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IDYL, THE GIRL MINER; or, ROSEBUD ROB ON HAND.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF NOS. 1, 20, 26, 28, 32, 35, 39, 42, 45, 49, 53, 57, 61, 69, 73, 77, 80 OF BEADLE'S HALF-DIME LIBRARY.



"Ready, gents!" cried Simmonds, briskly. "One, two, three!" The word had scarcely passed his lips, ere the knives left the hands of the duellists, and went whizzing ominously through the air.

Idyl, the Girl Miner;

OR,

Rosebud Rob on Hand.

Rosebud Rob Novels, No. 2.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SPORT AND THE GAMESTER—THE UNKNOWN.

The opening scene is in Hayward City—a notable mining town, which has contributed its share toward making for the Black Hills country a reputation and notoriety second to none in the world as a district of mineral wealth and picturesque scenery, and with the most motley group of citizens within the scope of a continent.

We conduct the reader into a strange scene within the walls of an establishment known as the "Full Hand"—an enormous hall, manufactured of wood, holding a pack of cards, and hung above the entrance, giving the place its name.

It was exclusively a gambling den, run upon a large scale. No liquors were sold within the walls, and it was frequented only by the better class. The rougher element had not far to look for saloons wherein they could satisfy their depraved tastes—where they could drink and swear and fight the whole night long.

Not so at the "Full Hand" establishment. Everything was conducted upon "the square," and order always prevailed.

None were admitted the second time who had shown fight or otherwise had detracted from the pleasure of others.

But the scene often was exciting enough, for bitter hatred sprung there into quick life, though the parties interested were obliged to quit the parlors to satisfy their passions or revenge.

In depicting the coming scene, we hope many may profit by the illustration, and take warning in time of the evils resulting from gambling.

The "Full Hand" was not divided, but left in one long parlor, which was handsomely carpeted and the walls hung with glittering papers and fine pictures. The tables and chairs were all the best of their kind, and everything about the apartment was suggestive of elegance.

It is evening, and about the marble-top tables, under the brilliant lamp-chandeliers, are gathered men of all ages; but it is noticeable that all are quiet in demeanor, and moreover, generally well-dressed. Many, judged by their attire, are Easterners, while others, at a glance, are children of the Western plains or mountains.

One figure of the throng attracted special attention—that of a woman, in male attire.

Everybody knows and recognizes her by a nod, as she saunters about; indeed, it must be a stranger in the country of gold, who has not seen or, at least, heard of the twin dare-devils—Calamity Jane and Baltimore Bess.

It was the latter who was now sauntering about the parlor of the Full Hand, watching now and then the different games, or the votaries thereof.

She pauses before a table where two men are playing poker, and looks on complacently. A glance tells her that they are strangers in the mines.

The one is a young fellow of, perhaps, twenty-five years—a brawny, stalwart son of the West, whose limbs speak of iron and muscle.

He was clad in a hunting-suit of some coarse dark stuff, liberally fringed with fur of the mink, while knee-boots, a belt of weapons, and a black slouch hat completed his outfit.

His face was one that many would fancy—a dark face, with Spanish blood coursing through the veins; a face that, though dark, was capable of expression soft and tender. The features were all well-cast; the eyes were as black as jet, with a shrewd, wild light in their glance; and a pointed mustache, and long hair that swept the shoulders, were of a corresponding hue.

This man's companion was a florid, fat-faced individual, with sandy hair, colorless eyes, and a luxuriant pair of "Burnsides," which ever and anon he stroked complacently. His clothing was all of the finest texture and cut; his shirt-front immaculate, and studded with diamonds; and his vest-front ornamented with a golden cable-chain. A jaunty Derby hat, and a single eye-glass, completed the make-up of a genuine English aristocrat.

And it appeared that the Britisher was no novice at card-playing, for he won with a regularity that was astonishing—to Baltimore Bess, at least, who was an authority in such matters.

"See heer, Spanish!" she said, with a whistle denoting surprise, "how much has that chap wi' ther sluggins won out o' yer pile?"

The Spaniard looked up, and surveyed the girl, keenly.

"A square hundred, miss!" he said, after a moment. "Why?"

"Because I do hate to see an Englisher get ahead o' us Americans. Did ye ever heer ther story about ther American who went over to see John Bull? Wal, this chap war shown around by an obliging citizen, and expressed his opinyun o' everything as 'werry appropriate.' Finally they entered a hos-

pital, among the sick and dyin'. There, lo! an' behold, war the pictor o' George Washington hung up in plain view.

"What think you of that?" the Brit. demanded, maliciously.

"I think it werry appropriate ter ther occasion," war the Yank's reply.

"How so?" the Brit. ag'in asked, in surprise.

"Oh! thet's easy enuff. Thet pictor hung up in an English sick room, ar' a werry expressive emblem. Ye know thar never war a feller as made John Bull much sicker then that same George o' hatchet fame! An' thet's my exact idea!" concluded Bess, amid roars of laughter from the bystanders.

The Spaniard also smiled, as he noted his opponent bite his lips.

The game went on and the Spaniard lost at every turn, while the Englishman smiled, and stroked his beard with the grandiloquent manner of a conqueror.

"The game is mine, Sir Spaniard," he said, raking in the pile with a flourish. "You are broke, eh?"

"You have all my money," the Spaniard replied, bitterly. "I was a fool to wrestle against fate. But it is no time to back out now. I must have back my money. It is not mine, but Berenice's. Will any one loan me ten dollars to turn the game?"

There was no response.

None were there, evidently, who cared to back the gambler. His recent luck was most uncertain assurance.

"You had a boy with you a bit ago. Just for the novelty of the thing, put him up," the Englishman said, with a strange glitter in his eyes. "He is a pert-looking lad, and I'll offset him with a hundred dollars."

The Spaniard started violently, and shut his teeth together savagely. A terrible spell seemed to be working upon him. His chest heaved, and his breath came sharp and quick.

"Curse you!" he gasped, with a shudder. "You have it all your own way. And if I lose—what then?"

"Why, naturally, I have the boy. What I win I make it a point to keep. Come, decide at once. If you wish to risk the boy, put him up and win back what you have lost—if you can. Otherwise, I'll bid you a pleasant good-night."

The Spaniard bowed his head upon his hands, a moment, evidently struggling with the temptation.

Then, a moment later, he rose to his feet, his dusky face pale and stern, and a terrible glitter in his eyes, as he gazed at the English gamester.

"I am obliged to make the venture!" he said, huskily. "It is a terrible thing for a father to risk his only child upon a game of chance, but the money I have lost belonged to Berenice. I must win it back, or my wife will ne'er again look upon my face."

There was a pathos in the tone of the speaker that impressed the bystanders deeply, and they gathered about the table, of one accord, with bated breath to watch.

Giving a peculiar whistle, the Spaniard called to his side the wager he was to make against his opponent—a bright-faced, sunny-haired little boy of five or six years, who was clad in trowsers and jacket, with tiny top-boots upon his feet, and a small fur cap upon his wavy golden hair.

A sweet little fellow he was, and a murmur of admiration escaped the lookers-on as the Spaniard raised him upon his knee. There was a strong contrast between the parent and the child, but it was noticeable that the mold of the features was the same.

"Gentlemen!" the Spaniard said, "I am about to risk my little son upon a game of chance. My name is the same name that, years ago, threw the southwestern gold mines into a pphrensy of excitement, and I am the son of the noted road-rider, whose name I bear—*Joaquin Murietta*!"

A low murmur ran through the room, and curious glances were leveled upon the Junior Joaquin; for there were men in the den who had lived in the days of the senior, and had had dealings with him that caused his dark face ever to be in their eyes. After a moment, Joaquin, Jr., went on:

"I am going to risk my son, in order that I may win back that which was intrusted to my care by a loving wife. Little Pet," and the man looked into the pretty up-turned face of his child, with a tear glistening in either eye—"Little Pet, do you understand? If I lose this game, that man across the table owns you, and will take you away from me and mamma!"

A startled, scared look came over the face of the child, as he regarded the English gamester through his big blue eyes. He did not seem to understand the full meaning of the words—it was more his childish fear of strangers which caused him to blanch.

"Come!" the gambler said, crisply. "If you are going to play, drop the boy, and deal the pasteboards. I have other business to attend to, to-night!"

Joaquin kissed his child twice upon the forehead, and then stood him up on the floor by his side.

He turned to the game, like one moved by mechanism.

The crowd about the table had increased in numbers, and all stood with silent interest to watch the game.

Baltimore Bess raised Little Pet up in her arms.

"Ye purty little pinner!" she murmured, stroking back the soft sunny hair. "So they're goin' ter gamble you off, eh? Et's a blasted shame, an' ef I know it, Baltimore Bess 'll be around ter purtect you. Do you love mamma, Pet?"

"I love mamma and papa!" the little fellow said, throwing his arms about her neck. "And I love you, too!"

Something like a tear came into Bess's eye, but she quickly brushed it away.

A natural womanly love for the innocent child was growing in her heart, albeit she would have been astonished had she been apprised of the fact.

The game was now opened.

The Englishman was cool, confident.

The Spaniard was nervous, and trembled visibly, although he endeavored to shake off his agitation.

He was conscious that all eyes were upon him—conscious that he was losing that which, next to a loving wife, he held dearest to his heart.

At last, he threw down the only card in his hand, and staggered to his feet, with a gasp. While the cool, cynical voice of the Britisher said:

"I am the winner, sir, and the boy is mine!"

"Yes, yours!" Joaquin said, hoarsely. "My God, what a fool I have been! What a madman to believe I could change my luck!"

A hush of death prevailed within the room. Every eye was turned upon the Spaniard.

His face had grown strangely white, his limbs seemed momentarily paralyzed; he reeled like one in a state of intoxication.

"The boy is mine!" repeated the winner, a spice of the malicious in his tone, as he glanced at the innocent child.

"You need not fear for the welfare of your offspring, Sir Joaquin. As it happens that I am an English lord, I'll bring the little fellow up, and make a title for him."

"A title!" Joaquin gasped, glaring at him wildly. "A title! That does not give me back my child!"

"Well, no, not exactly," the other returned, with a sarcastic laugh. "There is no law that can take him away from me now!"

"Ho! ho!" exclaimed Baltimore Bess. "Thet's ther wrong kind o' fruit fer buzzards to eat, John Bull. Ef ther court ain't off, I've got the lad, an' possession's two or sev'ril pints o' ther law, accordin' ter ther hymn books; an' as thar's none that know better how ter handle a six-shooter, I'm bettin' ther galoot ye kall Joaquin, he hes his b'ye, ef he wants et!"

The Englishman adjusted his eye-glass, and stared at the dare-devil in astonishment.

"Oh! ye needn't peek at me thr'u' thet small-sized windy-pane," the girl continued, unabashed. "It's me, way down ter terra-firma, you bet! Baltimore Bess is my frontpiece, ef ye want ter know et. Here, Joaquin, junior, take your child, and I'll dare!—ay! double-dare!—any man present ter try ter hinder you!"

The Spaniard started forward, half-eagerly; but the next moment he staggered back again, his face stern and pale as death.

"No!" he said, a hoarse menace in his tone. "I will not take the child. The Englishman won, and I never squirm out of my wagers. If, however, I can raise money enough 'twixt this and morning, I will play to win him back."

"On the contrary, you will do nothing of the kind," the lord said, with a chuckle. "I refuse, hereafter, to flip so much as a single card with you. Come! bid your child adieu, for I wish to retire to my hotel!"

A murmur of indignation was heard on either hand; but it did not seem to affect the winner, for he smiled evilly and stroked his luxuriant "Burnsides."

Joaquin gave him a glance which was far from loving, and then, turning, imprinted a hasty kiss upon the child's forehead.

"Good-by, my poor boy!" he gasped, in a choked voice; then he staggered toward the door, tears rolling down his brown cheeks.

"Papa! papa!" Little Pet called, struggling to get to the floor from Bess's arms.

At the door Joaquin paused, and gazed back. Every eye was upon him.

Every man in the room was watching him, with a spice of pity at heart.

The strong man gave a last, farewell glance at the child, his features working with emotion; then he turned his black, gleaming eyes upon the Englishman, whose gaze wavered, and face grew a shade less florid.

It was a terrible glance of undying hatred that glowed from the Spaniard's eyes, and every man in the room felt its deadly magnetism.

Then, after a moment, the man's chin had dropped until it rested upon his breast. He turned mechanically, opened the door, and was gone, out in the blackness of a moonless night.

When he was out of sight, Baltimore Bess turned and faced the Englishman, who was regarding her with a cynical glance, which brought a flush to her cheeks.

"Tell me your name!" she said, in her decisive way.

"Oh, certainly!" was the reply, and the foreigner laid a card upon the table near by. "My name is Cavendish—Lord Byron Cavendish, at your ladyship's service. In what way can I serve you?"

"Serve me?" cried Bess, scornfully. "W'en et cums thet er Englisher hes ter serve me, I kick the bucket, you bet! Joaquin said you should have the boy, and so here he is. But, mind you, in taking him, if ye ever so much as harm a hair of his precious little head, I'll transform ye inter a monument fer a hole in ther ground, quicker'n a bullwhacker ever soaked pizen!"

A loud cheer from the crowd was sufficient guarantee that the general spirit was in keeping with that of the dare-devil.

Lord Cavendish smiled defiantly, as he seized Joaquin's terrified child, and raised him in his arms.

"Don't fear that the child will suffer harm by being in my possession!" he said, moving toward the door. "Au revoir, all!"

He turned to make his exit, but in doing so, ran fairly against an individual who had just entered.

"Aw! I say, it's deuced unkind of you to mistake me for a battering-ram. Aw! Who is the awful swell, anyhow?" and an eye-glass was poised in front of the new-comer's left optic, while he surveyed the Englishman critically.

His lordship had also stepped back a pace in order to scan the dandified character, with whom he had collided.

For the individual in question was made up on decidedly dandyish principles, to say the least.

His immaculate white shirt and vest, and his fashionably cut clothing were all of the best material, while the polished silk hat, a flaring red necktie, a ponderous gold chain strung several times across his vest, a liberal display of flashing jewelry, and a gold-headed cane, to say nothing of the exquisitely fitting patent-leathers upon his feet, were the general items of his outfit.

Evidently the English lord was a degree startled by the apparition, for he completed his survey with a contemptuous humph!

"Who in the name of the queen are you?" he demanded, sharply.

"Hello! by all their wildcats that ever chawed mother-in-laws. Ef I don't know that gallus galoot, may I never ag'in be called a man o' ther people. It's Rosebud Rob, the Sport, an' I'll bet my chips on it, you bet. Hyar, old pard, just lend us yer paw while I wring ther grip out o' et!"

"Aw, is that you, Bessee?" the Sport said, shaking hands with the girl. "Glad to see you! But, aw! I say, by Jove! who is the individual who bumped against me?"

"Haw! haw! Don't ye know, Rosey. That's the galoot who sets himself up ter be a lord uv creation. Cavendish is his name. He do luk like a caven sort o' diah, don't he, now?"

"Aw!" the sport said, with a grand sniff. "A most deucedly insolent puppy—ah! 'pon honor; a cross between the mongrel cur and the—the coyote—ah! Ha! ha! Good joke, eh? Deucedly pointed joke!"

"What do you mean by insulting me, you fool?" Lord Cavendish growled, advancing threateningly. "Do you know an Englishman of blood never receives insult, without retaliation?"

"Aw! is that true? Really, you must excuse my ignorance pertaining to English blood. Aw! you are so deucedly clever, my lord, what do you say to taking a scull—just for exercise, you see?"

And in his hands the dandy sport held a glistening pair of revolvers.

Cavendish saw them—saw that matters had an unhealthy outlook for him, and with a curse, he seized Joaquin's child in his arms again, and left the gaming-house.

CHAPTER II.

THE HERMIT OF CASCADE CITY—IDYL

MANY miles to the north and west of Hayward City, among the mountain wilds, was one of those hidden valleys, so many of which have puzzled the surveyors of Jenny's expedition, as in many instances they closely resemble each other.

The mouth of the one in question, at its southern extremity, was narrow, and choked with dense growths of chaparral, and very few would have suspected the existence of the valley, or have attempted to penetrate into it. Beyond the chaparral, it ran on northward, clearing up of timber, and becoming grassy and level at the bottom, from whence it gradually sloped up into rugged foothills, and emerged into mountains of almost perpendicular rock.

The valley was several miles long and finally ended in the face of a large waterfall, or cascade, which leaped from crag to ledge, until it fell at last in a wide glass-like sheet into the valley, and rushed away in foam-flecked rapids through a narrow channel in the valley bottom.

The roar of the falls made constant music in the little valley, and the misty fog rose from over the water like a dense cloud of whitish smoke.

It was the picturesque beauty of Nature's scenic hand, and one standing among the distant crags that sided the valley, could but be impressed with the combined grandeur and beauty of the scene. The crystal waters tumbling down the rugged rocks, from far above, with musical din; the little valley, with its rushing waters, its flowered banks, and green and autumnal variegated colors—the single little log-cabin with its well-weeded garden patch, which nestled down almost in under the shadow of the falls—all these items lent to the scene a peculiar charm, that was pleasant and lulling to the human sense.

At least, it was so to a single person who, posted up among the crags, was idly surveying the view, through a powerful field-glass.

He was a fair-skinned, fair-haired young fellow, stalwart, and well-proportioned, with a face attractive in its regularity of feature, the expressive brown eyes and a firm mouth, slightly shaded by a mustache. A guess at his age, would have given him not more than three and twenty years.

Neatly attired, and armed with weapons of a superior make, he looked wholly unlike the sportsman occasionally met with in the Western mountains. There was that in his dress and bearing which spoke both of refinement and a genial nature.

He evidently was much interested in the scene below him, for he gazed upon it long and admiringly.

"It is beautiful!" he finally murmured, lowering his glass, and recasting it. "If I were an artist I should never stop short of painting the views hereabouts. In my opinion, the spot below there dis-

counts any views I have yet seen in America. And the cabin yonder, under the shadow of the waterfall, seems singularly out of place, for I see no signs of human presence. Just such a spot as that would I select for my future home, were I not—well, if I hadn't a Sir prefixed to my name, and were not expecting to step into an obliging uncle's shoes. With a pretty wife, why couldn't a fellow have a jolly life down in this secluded mountain nook? I'm going down into the valley," he said at last, slinging his handsome rifle behind his back. "Even if the cabin is untenanted, a fellow could spend an agreeable day on that green grass. Wonder if Cavendish will miss me? He's able to take care of himself; so here goes."

And the young baronet began to clamber down from crag to crag, in order to get into the valley.

It was no easy job, and several times he nearly lost his footing, and was on the eve of being precipitated to the rocks below.

But he was quick, and possessed of considerable strength, and after a series of harmless tumbles and slips, he descended a grassy slope into the heart of the valley.

Pausing a moment to rest, he made a discovery which he had not observed through his glass.

In spots the bottom of the valley was sandy, and these spots were staked off by little flags upon sticks. There had been channels opened here and there, and rows of sluice-boxes constructed, with a head-gate to turn off or on water from the rushing stream.

In fact, every thing was handy for wash-mining, and miner's implements lay scattered about upon the ground.

"Well! well! So it chances that I have 'stumbled down and struck it rich,' as these artistes-in-digging have it," the young baronet said, with a puzzled expression. "Some one has got a mine here, all by himself. Secluded, and most charmingly located, too. I wonder what lucky mortal may be chief here? Surely, there is but little chance for discovery—yet, a freak caused me to penetrate this solitude. Ah! the cabin, yonder; and, as I live, there's an old man sitting in under the willow, by the door. Hurrah! I'll strike for him, as sure as my name is Tom Somerset—with a *Sir* at the extreme fore-part of it!"

And, true to his word, the young tourist started off on a swift stride toward the cabin, which was several hundred yards away.

As he approached the cabin, he perceived that it had a home-like appearance. A door and a couple of windows fronted westward, and a portico shadowed the door, while over all towered a large willow.

A little pebbled path ran down to the edge of the stream, and on either side was bordered by beds of cultivated flowers, which sent forth a delicious perfume. Back of the cabin was a well-kept garden, boasting of potatoes, cabbage, corn, and many other products of eastern gardens, and everywhere were neatness and thrift.

Under the willow-tree, in a great rustic arm-chair, sat an old man—a cripple, evidently, as a pair of crutches lay upon the ground by his side, watched over by an ugly-looking canine companion, of a decided bull-dog appearance.

The man was thin and emaciated in form and face, with a hollow look about the eyes, and a sunkenness of the cheeks, that bespoke the working of some disease. His hair was snowy-white, but of beard he had none. As for his garments they were of the commonest material, but, at the same time, clean and unpatched.

As Tom Somerset approached in his free graceful stride, the old man attempted to rise, but sunk back with a gasp of exhaustion.

"Pray do not be alarmed!" Sir Tom said, reassuringly. "I have not come to do you harm, but, rather, to beg your hospitality, for a few days, for which I will pay you liberally—in advance, if you wish?"

"Who are you?" the old man demanded, suspiciously, eying the baronet with a keen gaze. "Why have you come here?"

"For no bad purposes, let me assure you," Somerset said, taking a seat upon the rocky doorstep.

"I am an English tourist, who, in company with another companion, has been doing the American continent, and seeing the sights. Yesterday, I started off in this direction, in search of gold, game or any thing that might tend to interest me. And it turns out that I dropped right down into this little mountain vale, scarcely expecting to find such a lovely retreat."

"Then you like the picture!" the cripple demanded, waving his hand about him, with an expression of pride upon his grizzled features—"you like it?"

"Most certainly. Any one with half an eye for beauty could do no less than pay Nature an admiring tribute, in recognition of the loveliness of this spot."

The enthusiastic speech of the young stranger seemed to banish any prejudices the old man may have had.

"What is your name, young man?" he demanded. "Sir Thomas Somerset, at your service—usually abbreviated to plain Tom Somerset, as I am, in no particular, proud of my title."

"That at least shows good sense on your part," the other replied. "My name is Abbey—Jason Abbey, though by the few who have ever visited me here, I am known as Old Elk, the Hermit."

"Then you have lived here long, sir?"

"Ay!—long as ten years; before the gold fever broke out into a blast in the Black Hills, I worked my way here, and built my home, with the intention of becoming a recluse from the wiles and villainy of a wicked world. Since the day I first entered it, I have never left this valley, but twice. So

you see, I have been a hermit, in the true sense of the word, young man."

"Indeed, yes. You must have had strong cause for isolating yourself so long from your fellow-men."

"Yes, there were deep and strong causes—and many of them. One, I was tired of sin and the sinning; an unseen hand pointed out to me the quiet peace of this life, and with my child, then but little better than a babe, I came. With my child and with my God, I have led a blessed life, and have been far happier than I should have been, had I not come!"

"But, how have you been able to maintain yourself, all these years in what is yet literally a howling wilderness?"

"Until within a year past, I have been in good health, and gained a living with my rifle, and such vegetables as I could raise with my little spot of garden. Since I have become afflicted with consumption and the rheumatism, my child has taken my place."

"How old is your son?"

"My son? ha! ha! I never was blessed with a son. Idyl is a girl."

"Idyl?"

"Yes. Does the name strike you as being peculiar?"

"I must admit that it does," Sir Tom replied. "I can't say that I ever heard a name applied to woman so odd and yet so pretty."

"And Idyl is as odd and eccentric as her name—as fearless as a lion—as brave as they make 'em. She will be in from a hunt, soon."

"But you have not yet told me if you would give me the hospitality of your board!" Sir Tom reminded.

"Ah! I had forgotten it. Y-yes, you are welcome to stay, as long as you behave yourself, and don't go to getting spooney over my child. Remember, the first word of compliment or love you speak to her, I will cause you to repent, even though you know not how. I welcome you as my guest—no more."

"You need not fear that I shall entangle myself in Cupid's net!" Sir Tom replied, with a laugh and a yawn. "It was to get rid of London belles and their maneuvering mantras that I plucked up courage to visit the country of Uncle Sam."

"By the way, who is the other companion, of whom you spoke?" the hermit asked.

"Oh! Lord Cavendish. I left him in Hayward, to his cards, wine and cigars, while I explored the mountains and enjoyed their wondrously fine scenery!"

Old Elk bowed his head forward upon his hands, and was silent for several moments. He seemed to be trying to recall something which had been familiar to him in the past, but had grown dim and indistinct.

"You say your name is Somerset?" he at last interrogated, looking up. "I once knew of the Somerset of Derbyshire—"

"You then knew my father, no doubt," Sir Tom replied, "for he lived when you must have been born. His name was Sir Gerald."

The old man shook his head with a smile. "It might have been, but my memory has so deserted me in my latter years, that I can rarely remember any of the scenes or associations of my early life."

"You must be pretty well advanced in years, then?"

"Nay; there is many an older man than I, whose head is brown instead of white. I am but forty-five, sir, though you would judge me past seventy."

"Indeed I should! What, may I ask, has been the cause of your premature age?"

"Ah! it was that which brings many a man to his grave. The double scavengers—*trouble* and *consumption*—the latter perhaps caused by the incessant worry superinduced by the former. But, think not that I am even unhappy, wreck as I am. I am happier now than many a man of erect frame and fine appearance. There is One above whom I am proud to call my father; besides, I have carefully reared one of the flowers of all women, in my Idyl. You shall see her presently, and if you do not agree with me that she is a beauty, I'll give up beat. Fearless in times of danger; modest, sensible and charming; easy to offend, but quick to forgive, she is my precious only child, for whom I would not take a king's ransom!"

"I am already eager to see her—am anxious to meet this paragon of the wilderness," Sir Tom muttered under his breath, while aloud he said:

"I shall be much pleased to meet your daughter, sir; and I trust while I stop, I may be regarded, not as a stranger, but as a son to you."

"If you need my assistance or money—"

"Ha! ha! you would offer me money, eh?" the old man chuckled, as if there was something amusing to him in the simple idea. "Why, young man, I dare say I am worth more to-day than you, with all your titles and lordly estates! You see those claims down the valley yonder, which appear as if they had never been more than staked off. Well, sir, I have worked them patches of sand for eight long years—washed out the golden grains, and hoarded them away in amounts which would make your eyes sparkle. My riches are buried where no one but myself can ever find them, without directions from me."

"But how, pray, could you have worked so long in one or more beds of sand? There must be a bottom where there is no gold."

"I'll tell you the secret," the old man said, in a whisper. "Every new moon the water of the cascade increases in volume and washes through the valley, in some places overflowing the banks by two feet. When the flood has subsided, those spots where the water overflowed are covered with golden sands."

"Ah, yes! I see. So, when you wash out one fortune, the tide brings you another."

"Exactly."

"Well, you have indeed a bonanza. Is there no quartz ore in the immediate vicinity of this valley that would pay better than this surface dirt?" Sir Tom asked.

"None at all. The quartz formation abruptly ends many miles from here, and, also, there is no fairly-paying surface dirt until you strike this valley. Consequently, few but hunters enter here."

"I suppose you have to bribe them to keep the secret of your fortune, eh?"

"Not at all. Those who have come have been so well received, that they would be more than ingrates to betray me in my solitude."

"Besides, what could they do to remain? You have all the best portions of the valley staked off, eh? You were first and, consequently, are last possessor."

"Of course. They could ill-afford to try and rout me out of my snug little hermitage. Besides, the mines yonder, and all the tools, belong to Idyl, to whom I sold out my interest."

"And she now does the running in place of yourself, sir?"

"Exactly. And fully as well, too. But, come into the cabin, young man, and I'll see if we cannot hunt you up something fit to eat. As the day has several hours of light, yet, it is not likely my child will return, immediately."

"Pray do not put yourself to the least trouble," Sir Tom replied. "Before I eat, I must beg to leave you, until I can fetch a noble horse, whom I left in the mountains. By that time, perhaps, Miss Abbey will have returned. I shall not be long, I trust!"

And then the young baronet strode away down the valley, whistling merrily. It was evident that his spirit was free, and unfettered, and the same might have been safely added concerning his heart.

The old Hermit of Cascade Ranch, as he had named his possessions, gazed after Sir Tom with a keen, scrutinizing glance—a look full of questioning anxiety, and maybe a tittle of suspicion.

"A fine feathered bird!" was his muttered observation; "as a rule, they are of little value. A baronet, and undoubtedly well-heeled, or else he would not be traveling in this country. He is well-educated, refined, and liberal. Ah! young man, I shall study you deeply, and solve your worth. If you prove to be your father's own son, I have such a prize for you, as no true man could fail to worship. Gerald Somerset, of the bygone days, is dead. Poor fellow. He was a noble and generous soul, and if his boy is the same, it shall not be ill for him. He shall, if he so desires, woo and wed my child—my precious Idyl, whom I regard as the fairest and loveliest creature of her sex. Then, when I have seen her married to a loving husband, I shall give her my treasured wealth, and be content to pass out of this solitary existence, into a sphere of life which is of the Godly."

As he ceased his mutterings, the old recluse bowed his head forward, and seemed wrapped in thought of a deep, ay, sacred nature.

"Papa!" exclaimed a cheery voice, "papa, what is the matter?"

CHAPTER III.

JOAQUIN'S COTTAGE—BERENICE'S RESOLVE.

A new road had been cut through the mountain wilderness. Men were at work upon it—men in masks, too, who seemingly were chary to show their faces to the light of day.

The road wound from one side of a giant mountain, in a semicircle, around to the opposite side, where it ended, uncompleted, on the jagged rocky bluffs which arose to the east of Cascade Valley.

At the eastern commencement of the road the stage trail ran through Blind Canyon and connected with it.

The length of the new road, so far as constructed, must have been eleven or twelve miles; while it yet lacked a couple of miles of debouching into the little canyon where Jason Abbey held his own.

The object in the construction of the highway was evident, for nearly midway between its two terminations stood a little shanty, in front of which a gate was stationed. Back of the shanty was a larger extension, which was built against a face of rock. A neatly painted sign hung over the door of the shanty, bearing the inscription:

"JOAQUIN'S TOLL-GATE."

A woman sat upon the steps of the shanty, glancing ever and anon up and down the newly-finished dugway, while her deft fingers plied the needles that were working into shape a beautiful zephyr shawl.

A plainly-attired, unpretentious little body this woman—young, even below the age of nineteen, if one could judge by appearances.

Just of the medium height and development was she, with a clear-cut brunette face; eyes and hair as black as jet, and teeth pearly white. There was an expression of quiet content, mixed with matronly anxiety about her face, which was peculiarly attractive. Then, occasionally, she would allow a pensive smile to steal about her lips, and her eyes would brighten up wonderfully.

"Dear Joaquin, and Pet!" she murmured softly, as the needles clicked merrily together. "How I have missed them both. Joaquin promised me his stay should be short—yet, he has already been gone over a week. Can it be that he has gone back to the gaming-table again? No, God forbid! He promised me with the last kiss that he would not play a game, and I cannot believe he would break his word."

"And, yet, I can not account for his tardiness. He was to take the last money, which my father left me, and purchase powder with which to complete the blasting of our road. Then, we shall begin to

realize the returns for our investment. The laborers can be discharged, and with the income brought in by the toll-travel, oh! how nicely we could live. Poor Joaquin! where would he have been, now, had not a woman's guiding hand lured him away from the gaming table? He was going down hill to destruction at a rapid pace, when I first met him. Now—"

An anxious cloud mantled the young wife's brow. The "Now" was suggestive of many a change.

Why did not Joaquin return?

Had he again fallen prey to the fascinating snares of the gaming-table?

Or, had he been set upon by some of the murderous roughs, who swarmed in the fastnesses of the mountains?

As the wife sat pondering over these questions, her gaze fell upon a horseman coming up the road, and she arose to her feet with a little cry of delight, and waved her zephyr-work in the air, for she recognized in the new-comer, her husband, as well as his snow white steed.

But, the enthusiastic glow suddenly died out of her face and eyes, and she reeled back, a sudden compression of her lips making her appear grim and stern.

She leaned against the door-post for support, and glared toward the approaching horseman, as if she were uncertain whether to stay or flee.

What was this she had discovered? Was she dreaming—or had she suddenly gone mad?

Little Pet was not with Joaquin!

No! not with him; and the sharp eyes of the wife detected the hesitation of the husband in approaching—saw a guilty flush upon his face, a sullen gleam in his dark eye.

She set her teeth hard together, and nerved herself—a bitterness of death was gnawing at her heart-strings.

Nearer and nearer the horse of the husband approached, until it stopped in front of the gate, and Joaquin Muriete sat with folded arms, and bowed head.

He knew that she, to him terrible, accusing eyes of his wife were upon him; he could literally feel them penetrating into his heart and mind. And, he sat, silently guilty; bitterly repentant, fiercely revengeful—upon his foes.

"Joaquin!"

Berenice spoke the name with its full Spanish accent—spoke it in a tone of immeasurable contempt, mingled equally with sternness and pity—in a tone that caused Muriete to tremble visibly. But he commanded himself by a master effort, and raised his eyes to meet her burning gaze.

"Berenice, I return alone!" he said, hoarsely. "Do not ask me what has become of the child, for—"

"You would not tell me, eh?" she finished, with a frightened gasp; "but you shall tell me, Joaquin—you shall tell me where is our child—our little darling Pet, or I'll—"

She hesitated to complete the sentence, and thrust a revolver she had drawn back into the folds of her dress.

"Go on! do what was then uppermost in your mind," Joaquin said, with a bitter laugh. "Take my miserable life, and you will save me the trouble of committing suicide."

A horrified, frightened expression came into her eyes as she listened to him. He spoke in that same reckless way—with the same biting bitterness which had been characteristic of him in the past, when the devil had levied a mortgage upon his soul and body—and she had bought him over.

"Tell me where is our child!" she gasped, when she could find power to speak again.

"Dead!" he replied, with another bitter chuckle, "dead, forever, to you and me! Do not chide me, Berenice, but hear me out. I have been lying in the mountains three days and nights trying to summon courage to appear before you, and, at last, I am here. That terrible gaze take away—I cannot bear it. It will drive me furious in five minutes. The words you would say repress, lest I refuse to tell you of your child!"

Berenice bowed her head with a groan of anguish. She yearned, yet feared, to hear the worst.

"As I said, the child is forever dead to you and me," Joaquin went on. "I gambled him away, as well as the money which you gave me to purchase powder with. I shall not attempt to apologize for myself. I broke my promise to you in a weak moment, and gambled away your child. I ask you not to forgive me—I crave but one boon from you!"

"What?" Berenice asked, calmly.

She had just found a new-born power of control over her heart—over her emotions.

"You shall know!" Joaquin said, leaping from his saddle to the ground, and drawing a revolver. "Here, take this weapon, and put a bullet through my heart!"

His bitterness of tone was proof enough, that he was in earnest. He was not the man to joke, in such a moment as this.

Berenice shrunk back with a little cry of horror.

"No! no!" she said, with a quiver. "Joaquin Muriete, I will not take your life, nor that of any man. Though as fierce blood runs in my veins as in yours, I will not do murder by way of satisfying a revengeful craving. God joined our hands together as man and wife. The bond is henceforth broken. Our paths diverge, here; you go your way, I go mine!"

"Berenice!"

"Nay! do not speak to me, in that way. I no longer can be moved to even respect the man who would gamble away his child!" she cried, passionately. "All the love for you will I crush out of my

heart—all wifely affection will I smother, until you bring me back my child! Don't think to beg—'tis useless. I go, now, never to return, until you bring me back that of which you have robbed me!"

She turned back into the shanty, with a cold bow, and after she was gone, Joaquin, Jr., sat down upon a little bench, which stood near at hand, and bowed his head, while tears coursed down his brown cheeks.

He spoke not—only a shudder, now and then, bespoke the agony he was undergoing.

Berenice came out, presently, with a firm, decided step, in which there was no faltering. A hooded cloak was fastened about her shoulders, and she carried a little paper-enveloped bundle.

"I have taken what few clothes I may need to wear," she said, pausing a moment, and gazing keenly up and down the road. "You are welcome to the rest—can even gamble them away, if you choose. I now leave you. Good-by, forever perhaps."

"Berenice!"

"Nay! do not call me back!" she cried, wheeling upon him, fiercely. "I owe you nothing—nothing at all. I picked you up from the gaming table, when you were going to perdition, and with God's aid I transformed you, as I supposed, into a man. But, like the tiger, you struck me a blow, when I had deemed you a gentle loving companion."

"Oh! Joaquin Muriete, a just and righteous God will not let this great wrong be put all upon a mother's head. I shall suffer, but you shall feel *His* wrath!"

"No more than I deserve!" he said, calmly, rising to his feet. "Go if you like. I shall not try to hinder you. But, when the name of Joaquin Muriete once more becomes a terror—not the old Joaquin, but the new—when you, with the rest, shall grow to fear his power, then it will be too late for even you to retract. Good-by, Berenice—will you touch my hand ere you go?"

"No! never! until you restore to me my child!"

"A-ah! then—then will you come back to me, Berenice?" he demanded, a new-born eagerness in his tone.

"I will promise you nothing, Joaquin Muriete. Let the future decide for itself."

She said no more, but walked away down the eastward road, leaving Joaquin gazing after her like a man bereft of his senses.

At last she came to a bend, around which she would pass from view of the shanty.

Would she look back?

Would she care to gaze back toward the man who had caused her so much needless pain?

Joaquin leaned forward, his gaze fastened eagerly upon her, his heart beating wildly, his breath coming in quick gasps of hope.

Nearer—nearer she approaches to the bend. Ha! she goes on and passes out of sight, without turning her head in the least.

Then, there rises an awful cry upon the clear mountain air—a weird, agonized shriek, which the canyon currents catch up and propel along in mournful detonating echoes, like the wail of a broken heart.

Joaquin Muriete lies flat upon the ground, as bereft of consciousness as the gray mountain crags that loomed around him.

His horse gives a whinny, and like a faithful dog, approaches his master. He smells the body over—even seizes the leathern waist-belt by his teeth, and raises Joaquin partly from the ground.

But as the limp body sags back a wonderful understanding seems to possess the noble animal, for with a louder whinny he leaps the gate and dashes up the more-newly finished part of the road, until, at last, he brings up at a point where scores of masked men are digging on the mountain-side.

"Hello! Joaquin's horse, by all the miracles!" exclaimed one stalwart smooth-faced fellow, pausing in his work, as the animal approached with a whinny and rubbed his nose upon his shoulder, after which he trotted back in the direction whence he had come. "What ails the beast?"

"Somethin' up—gone wrong!" spoke another. "If it's you, Lieutenant Phil, I'd go see what it's about. That beast o' Joaquin's ar' a l'arned animal, an' ye ken bet he wouldn't play sech a part of somethin' warn't out o' kilter, you hear me!"

"True enough, Aber," was the reply. "I think I'll run down to the gate, and see if everything's right there. It's getting on toward night; half a dozen of you may follow me on foot."

And, calling the white, the lieutenant vaulted into the saddle, and dashed down the road.

In the meantime another horseman from the opposite direction came up the new highway, and leaping from his saddle on arriving in front of Joaquin's cottage approached the body of the fallen chief.

He was none other than the young baronet, Sir Tom Somerset!

After leaving the cabin of the Hermit of the Cascade Gulch he had re-entered the mountains, and, though he had found the horse, he became puzzled, and finally quite lost. Chancing into Blind Canyon he had stumbled into the newly-made toll-road curving around the mountain.

This takes one in a westward direction, and may eventually fetch me nearer to the valley of the Hermit," he had said, after which he proceeded to follow the road, which resulted in his pausing before Joaquin's cottage, and finding the young chief lying senseless before his own door.

"Hello! I wonder what ails this poor fellow?" the baronet muttered. "I see no signs of his having been foully dealt with. Here is water handy; I'll see if I cannot resurrect him from this stupor. Ha! was the woman I met with down the road anything to him?"

Raising the body in his arms, the baronet dragged it within the shanty, the first room of which was neatly but rudely furnished. Here he laid him upon a couch of skins, and seizing a basin, proceeded to catch some water that trickled down across the road.

Returning into the shanty, he then bathed the chief's forehead, and poured a few drops of Nature's sparkling liquor between his lips.

Joaquin gave a shiver, and opened his eyes directly, with a start.

"Ha! who are you?" he gasped, as his sharp, wild gaze fell upon the stranger. "Tell me—who are you, and what do you want?"

"My name is Somerset, at your service!" Sir Tom replied. "Chancing to become lost in the mountains, I followed the new road, and came to where you were lying in front of this shanty. I dragged you in here, and set to work to restore you to consciousness."

"Yes!" Joaquin mused, passing his hand over his forehead. "I remember now—I fainted. I thank you, Mr. Somerset, for manifesting so much interest in my behalf. But stop! before you go let me ask you a question. Which direction did you come from?"

"From the east, sir."

"Ha! I thought so. Did you—did you see anything of a woman going eastward along this trail?"

"I did, sir. She was alone, and carried a bundle of clothing. I made an attempt to ask her concerning my shortest route to Cascade Valley, when she uttered a wild laugh, and sped on as if all the evil spirits were after her!"

"You speak of the Cascade Valley!" Joaquin, Jr., said, as he paced moodily up and down the floor. "What would you have there?"

"Nothing more than a few days of rest, I assure you," Sir Tom replied, feeling a trifle nervous in spite of himself, for there was that in the demeanor and flashing eye of the chief that would impress one not too favorably of the calmness of his heart. "I chanced down there earlier, to-day, and engaged accommodations for a short stay. I am now endeavoring to find how I can easiest get my horse and myself back into the vale."

For some time Muriete did not speak, but paced to and fro, with a keen glance anon at Sir Tom, who was awaiting the issue.

At last, however, he walked to a desk in one corner of the room, soon to return with a small golden stiletto lying in the palm of his hand. It was a mere toy, such as might be attached as the "charm" to a watch-chain, but Joaquin gazed at it sternly.

"Take this!" he said, handing it to Sir Tom. "Take it, and never be without it. Night and day have it fastened in plain sight. Now go! No, stop! I will first tell you my name. It is Joaquin Muriete, Jr. Perhaps you may hear the name again. And mind you, offer no harm to that little fairy of Cascade gulch, if you would *use*. Go now! Mount your horse and pass on up the road. If you are stopped, show the stiletto, and demand to be shown the easiest way into the Cascade gulch!"

Sir Tom bowed respectfully, and stepping from the shanty left the gate behind him, on the back of his trained horse.

From the doorway Joaquin watched him until he was out of sight; then stood gazing off among the rugged mountains, where the night was gathering thickly.

"Oh! thou God!" he murmured, "I am all alone—deserted by my wife—separated from my child!"

CHAPTER IV.

CASCADE CITY LOOKING PROMISING.

SIR TOM SOMERSET galloped away up the new mountain road, his mind busied with the mystery concerning matters at the cottage.

"Joaquin!" he muttered. "I have heard that name mentioned in connection with the gold-fever in California. This Joaquin and that cannot be the same—probably are father and son, as the present one is a young man of nearly my own age. Ha! here comes a horseman, and he is masked, at that!"

It was the man whom we have previously mentioned as Lieutenant Phil. He was mounted upon Joaquin's white horse, and bound toward the toll-gate. But he drew rein in the middle of the road as Sir Tom came up, and in one hand he held a pistol ready for use.

"Halt!" he commanded. "You can go no further without paying toll. As I am acting agent for Muriete's toll-road, I'll be lenient, and charge you only a V!"

Sir Tom laughed.

"I guess you are playing with the wrong trigger," he said, drawing the golden stiletto. "Joaquin himself assured me that this would pass me over the road."

"Ha! the signal-sign. Very well, sir; since you possess that, you are at liberty to pass on. But tell me first, what has happened at the gate?"

"You, perhaps, can best learn that," Sir Tom replied. "I found your chief lying in front of the shanty, but succeeded in fetching him back to consciousness. I left him at the shanty."

With a bow the lieutenant put spurs to his horse, and dashed on toward the toll-gate, while Sir Tom continued upon his journey.

He had no difficulty in passing the men who were working upon the road, after he exhibited the stiletto; and one of them pointed out the easiest way of descending into the valley beyond.

So by the time it was fully dark he rode up in front of the hermit's cabin, and dismounted with a sigh of relief.

The evening was warm, and the old man sat in his arm-chair under the weeping-willow, smoking away at his pipe.

"So you have arrived, eh?" he said, raising himself upon his crutches and hobbling forward. "Take the bridle from your horse, and turn him out to graze. There's supper for him in the valley, and supper for you in the cabin."

Tom made haste to obey.

He was really possessed of a strong appetite, as a result of his day's rambles; besides, he was equally hungry to feast his eyes upon the old man's daughter, to whom he had paid so many eloquent praises.

On following the hermit into the main apartment of the cabin, which answered equally the purpose of kitchen and parlor, he was, however, disappointed at beholding nothing bearing the least resemblance to a woman.

There was a large fireplace at one side, with a cupboard in close proximity; a table in the middle of the floor; an old-fashioned lounge across one corner; also, a few common chairs, here and there. A book-shelf, containing a few well-worn volumes, and a cracked mirror completed the main furniture, which, though humble, was neatly arranged, and everywhere were evidences of taste and thrift.

Upon the table was a common tea-set, and a meal, consisting of bread, milk, butter and cold meat, with wild pear-sauce. It was common, but looked mighty tempting to Sir Tom, who had not tasted food since early morning, and very sparingly, then.

"Be seated, and help yourself," the hermit said, pointing to the table. "It isn't a repast fit for the Queen, but we manage to subsist upon it. We ate before you came."

It was upon Sir Tom's tongue to ask where the other one of the "we" was, but he restrained his impatience, and finished his meal.

Afterward they adjourned to the open air to smoke, for Sir Tom carried a stock of choice cigars. The old man occupied his chair, while Sir Tom seated himself upon the doorstep.

"I see you are to have a highway put through the valley," he observed, carelessly. "I presume you are already cognizant of the fact?"

"Yes," the hermit replied, with a nod. "I am powerless to help it. My hermitage will soon be a matter of the past."

"The road will naturally bring in prospectors and adventurers, and will you not be in danger of being robbed?"

"Robbed!" the old man echoed, with a start—"robbed! Of what?"

"Of everything—of your hidden wealth—of your claims, yonder—ay! of that you prize most, your daughter, Miss Idyl."

"But who would rob me, young man? Who would molest a man who has no enemies?"

"Oh! there are hundreds—thousands who would do it, for the sake of gold, or to satisfy evil desires. You have been so long shut out from the world, that I fear you would harbor evil, unsuspectingly!"

"Ha! then you mean that your coming bodes me evil, sir?"

"No; on the contrary, my coming insures you a true and lasting friendship. But, I was referring to the class of adventurers who must soon come into this gulch. You will awake, some morning, to find a miniature city surrounding you, peopled by a heterogeneous swarm of humanity. You will be astonished. Men, seemingly friends, will plot against you. This one will scheme for the mine—that one will cast an envious eye upon your child—another, still, will plot for the buried treasure for which you care most, perhaps, next to your daughter. And some time, one of the enemies will strike your death-blow, and your child will be left alone in the world, in the midst of evil men, defenseless!"

"No! no! not quite that!" Old Elk replied, with a chuckle. "She is not defenseless, who has a strong arm, a dauntless courage, and a will to fight for her rights. And that same, has my Idyl!"

"Which, if true, causes me to admire her already," Sir Tom muttered, under his breath. Aloud, he said:

"Perhaps you are right, sir, but a single woman against a trio or more of evil men, has no advantages, certainly."

"Why do you say all these things to me?" the old man demanded, petulantly. "They do not serve to increase my peace of mind."

"A fact which I well understand, sir. But, I wish to arouse you to a true sense of danger, for I feel it in my bones that danger will come. You must be on your guard, if you intend to remain here."

"And you tell me this, without a selfish object, behind it all?"

"I tell you it, with no object in view, except to keep danger away from a helpless man, and a weak woman!" Sir Tom replied.

"Then, you are as noble as you seem to be," the other replied, "and I thank God that he has sent you as a friend and counselor."

At this juncture, a peal of merry, girlish laughter rung out, just behind Sir Tom, causing him to involuntarily leap to his feet, with a start.

"Ha! ha! ha! a weak woman! Ha! ha! ha! Did you hear him, papa?"

And the next moment, a trim girlish figure stepped out of the cabin, half-convulsed with laughter, which, evidently, was not affected; but which brought unconscious blushes to Sir Tom Somerset's cheeks.

"Did you hear him, poppy?" cried the sprite, again. "He called me a weak woman! Ha! ha! ha!"

And a fair, roguish face, and a pair of sparkling brown eyes were turned full upon the baronet, who was gazing at her, in surprised admiration.

The Hermit had not underestimated the attractions of his child. She was seventeen years of age, or thereabouts, with a well-rounded willowy form, perfected in each graceful contour, as was revealed

by a neat-fitting, semi-feminine hunting costume of pliable deer-skin; a bust, and a pair of shoulders and arms that would have been a sculptor's pride to model after; a pure white neck and bosom just a trifle revealed by open collar, which were spotless and pretty.

A round little head, with a confusion of wavy hair flowing back upon the shoulders, and a face that was pretty and fascinating in every lineament. The eyes, too, were such as could express in one moment the roguish merriment of a happy nature—in the next could flash with scorn and contempt, or fire with anger and resolute will.

In addition to the deer-skin costume, there were dainty boots upon the shapely feet, and a slouch hat set jauntily back from the fair, open forehead.

No weapons wore this gazelle of the wilderness, to outward view—unless, as Sir Tom inwardly concluded, they were her mischievous eyes.

Surely they pierced into his heart with a certainty equal to a leaden bullet or a keen knife.

After the last words uttered by the hermit's daughter, there was an awkward pause of a moment; but the old man at last came to the rescue.

"Sir Tom," he said, "this is my child—my Idyl. Idyl, Sir Thomas Somerset, of Derbyshire, England."

If Sir Tom, with all his grand London life and social training, made a graceful acknowledgment, it was not more gracefully done by him than by the hermit's daughter.

In an instant she had thrown off her girlish mask, and no society belle ever made a finer bow.

"I am happy to welcome you to our wilderness home, sir," she said, frankly extending her hand. "I am sure papa and I ought to be proud of being honored by your coming—we have visitors so seldom, you know."

"It would need scarcely human presence to make me enjoy the wild spot you have chosen for a home, Miss Abbey; yet the wild, romantic beauty, together with the presence of your father and your charming self, combine to offer for my visit all the pleasure I could desire. And now, let me apologize for my uncomplimentary reference to you as a weak woman. Is it not enough for me to say that I have changed my mind entirely?"

"Quite enough, sir. I thank you for the unneeded compliment. Now, you will excuse me, I hope, for the duties of a housekeeper demand my attention."

Sir Tom bowed respectfully, and his eyes followed her until she was inside the cabin, flitting busily about her duties.

Then he turned to the hermit.

"Well?" the old man grunted, interrogatively, as he took an extra long puff at the cigar Sir Tom had previously given him.

"She is a beauty, indeed," was all the baronet said on that subject, for he seemed desirous of changing the channel of their conversation.

They sat under the willow, and talked on various topics until the moon showed her face over the mountain range with a brilliant flood of yellow light.

Then the hermit directed Sir Tom which room to occupy and hobbled away into the cabin, with the announcement that it was his bedtime.

Sir Tom, however, did not creep between the sheets until just before day-dawn, when the moonlight had gone.

He sat in the hermit's arm-chair and gazed off down the valley, while he smoked and cogitated over the events which had occurred since his discovery of the valley.

He held three faces before his mind's eye, and, with a singular sensation which he could not account for, studied them. They were the faces of Joaquin Muriete, the old hermit, and Idyl—the hermit's daughter.

We pass over a month before we look down again upon Cascade City, as the hermit had, from the first, named the spot he had selected for his home. We remember Sir Tom Somerset's prediction; we look with the expectation of seeing changes, and we are not disappointed.

The old hermit's cabin stands in under the shadow of the great cascade the same as before, surrounded by its garden and beds of flowers; and, on warm days, the old man still sits in his arm-chair beneath the giant willow, as of yore.

The rushing stream darts through its channel with a roar only second to that of the cascade, and there are no changes—no inventions yet to turn it from its course.

On the shores, however, there are changes, within a month.

A quarter of a mile from the hermitage there are shanties and cabins scattered on the shore of the stream, and here and there the gulch valley, to the number of a couple of score.

Men are seen, too, digging about, here and there; horses are grazing further on down the valley; a general appearance of new settlement is seen about.

To the east, a stage-road winds down into the valley from far up among the rocky crags.

A month has passed with these changes.

Sir Tom Somerset still lingers at the Hermitage, which, we may add, has been enlarged to the dimensions of a frontier hotel, with a bar, and boarding and sleeping accommodations attached.

A queer, green-goggled, little old lady had come over from Deadwood, and induced the hermit into the venture; had enlarged the place at her own expense, and in consequence, was doing a thriving business.

But, the old hermit shook his head, as, with Sir Tom, he sat in under the willow one evening.

"I don't like the change a bit!" he said. "The old quiet of the place is gone, and disorder reigns. Why, would you believe it, Sir Tom, I could not

sleep, last night, for the carousal in the bar-room, which lasted till near daydawn?"

"The same with me!" the young baronet replied. "You made a wrong move, when you let that woman build on against you."

"Yes! yes! I see it, now. Experience is a good eye-opener, Sir Tom. I thought to relieve Idyl, my child, of the indoor work, so that she could be as free as the eagle. Well! well! I suppose we shall have to put up with it. The thing won't last long, if they do not get gold, which they are not likely to. Do they show any disposition to crowd over onto Idyl's claims?"

"So far, no. One can't tell what they may do, though they appear like peaceable fellows. I guess they are a little more encouraged, so far, to-day. Several of them have struck a sand streak, with golden grain to it."

"Humph! It's about time for another moon-tide. Has Idyl washed out all the paying, in her claim?"

"I hardly know, Mr. Abbey. You have probably noticed that your daughter has given me the cold shoulder of late, and therefore, I am in the dark concerning her?"

"Eh?" the old man grunted, leaning forward, and peering into the baronet's face—"given ye the cold shoulder, has she? Well! well! What have you been doing, Sir Tom?"

"Alas! you've propounded a poser, now! I'm in total ignorance as to the origin or cause of Miss Abbey's coolness toward me!"

"Where is the child now?"

"That I am unable to tell you, unless she is in the bar-room. Of late she goes there at the close of each day's labor, and has her gold weighed, I believe."

The old man arose and hobbled into his portion of the cabin. A door had been cut through the wall, and communicated with the bar-room of Mrs. Matrevis's establishment.

Into the bar-room the hermit made his way upon his crutches.

There were several of the miners clustered at the bar, who had come to the valley, and they regarded him with curious glances.

Somehow it had got noised about that the hermit was the possessor of hidden treasure, and as nothing definite could be learned in the matter, he was regarded as a miser.

Paying little attention to those at the bar, the old man approached where Idyl was standing at the weighing counter, watching the clerk, a Mr. Sam'l Skinner, as he weighed out the dust and grains of gold.

Idyl looked up with a start, to behold her father, and he noticed then what had escaped his notice heretofore.

The roses had gone out of her cheeks wonderfully, in the last few days, when before she had been so bright and blooming. There was a restless, wearied light in her eyes, too, which had not been there before.

"Idyl!" the old man said, touching her on the shoulder, "when you have done here come into our part of the cabin. I want to speak with you."

She nodded, without speaking, and the old man hobbled back into the old cabin, which was reserved as his own. After Sam Skinner had finished weighing her gold, Idyl rejoined her parent, who was sitting out in under the willow tree, in his great arm-chair.

"Well, poppy, what is it?" she asked, evidently trying to restore a lost girlish enthusiasm to her speech. "What do you want of me?"

"Sit down, and I will tell you. Now, why is it that you are so cold in your demeanor toward our guest, Sir Somerset? Tom is a good boy, and I supposed you were getting along finely together, until—"

"He told you to the contrary!" Idyl finished, scornfully. "I am sure Mr. Somerset is very kind to enlist your sympathy in his case. Tell him I admire his pluck!"

She would have turned away, but at this moment the hermit called her back.

"Idyl! Idyl! child, stop! You must tell me what has caused your coldness toward Sir Tom! He is a noble fellow—is rich, and inherits proud blood. I had hopes for you in that direction, my pet."

"Then I must banish them for you, father. Between me and Sir Tom Somerset, there is nothing—never will be. If I were inclined to marry any one, there are scores I would choose from before him!"

She turned and went around the cabin toward the saloon.

The stage was just coming in, laden inside and out with passengers, both male and female.

Be it said, to her credit, the green-goggled proprietress of the only "ranch" in Cascade gulch, was a shrewd woman; and when a few of her dollars caused a glowing report of the "red-hot times" at Cascade City to be published in a Deadwood paper, naturally there was a stampede at once for the new strike, and the population was largely increased at every incoming stage, and Mrs. Matrevis reaped a rich harvest from her bar, and her lunch-counter.

CHAPTER V.

THE SPORT'S DEBUT—A STRANGE DUEL.

The stage drew up before the portals of Mrs. Matrevis's establishment and began to discharge its freight of humanity, which consisted of all classes and types, such as yet is found in any mining strike.

Idyl stood at one corner of the cabin, watching the busy throng which unloaded with a curious gaze.

It all seemed very strange to her, after having been reared in the solitudes as a hermit's daughter. She could not remember of having ever seen so many men at one time in her life as were disembark-

ing from the four-team stage, driven by sturdy Jake Johnson, whom the Abbeys knew, as he had often been in the valleys hunting ere he had taken to the stage.

"A big heap on 'em, Miss Idyl," the brawny son of Wisconsin said, touching his hat respectfully, as he approached where Idyl was standing. "Never heard that ar' stage grunt so as she did under that cargo. Whoop 'em up, Eliza! but that ar' a heap o' eccentric cusses among 'em, miss, an' ef ye don't see high times heer at ther Cascade my name ain't Jake Johnson—you bet on that!"

"What do you mean, Jake, by high times?" Idyl asked.

"How do I mean, leetle gal? Wall, now, I don't mind tellin' you that an artist in grave-digging, wouldn't do so bad ter set up a coffin an' toomb-stun factory around hayr, bein's my stage ter night hes fetched in about as tough a crew as eyer sot fut in thur diggin's. Ther's Cross-eyed Mike, frum Deadwood, ter start wif. Heerd o' him, ain't ye? Got a reg'lar repertation an' national fame fer hev'in' laid out more pilgrims then any other mortal in these yere hills. Makes et a p'int ter record each stiff he produces, wif a bell-punch, do thet galoot, an' them's darned few who ain't afraid o' him. Then, he's backed by sev'ril o' his pards, who'll fight fer him like bulldogs."

Idyl laughed, at this juncture.

"I guess you'll have to bring up some other tougher case, if you want to scare me, Jake," she said.

"Oh! no; I don't want ter skeer ye, miss—only ter illustrate sum o' ther peccoliarities o' ther gang w'at cum in on my stage. After Cross-eyed Mike, ther's ther gallus 'coon they call Rosebud Rob, ther dare-devil gal Baltimore Bess, an' a couple as calls 'em-selves Professor Bomberscoot, an' Mrs. General George Washington Bounce. Durn my buttons ef thet latter critter, hesn't made luv ter every conarned pilgrim aboard ther stage, durin' ther trip. A reg'lar old husband hunter ar' thet woman, you bet!"

And happy Jake went whistling away, while Idyl, out of curiosity, stepped into the bar-room, to see what was going on.

She often dropped in, since the coming of strangers to the gulch; and on several occasions, her quick hand had dashed away a pistol, or knife, that had been poised by some angry miner to take a comrade's life.

And, those who knew her had got to calling her the Angel of the Gulch.

The bar-room was now full, to overflowing, with humanity, but she managed to gain a position near the protective hand of genial Sam Skinner, where she could watch those around her.

After a long ride, the majority of the "new citizens" repaired to the bar, where they proceeded to wash down the dust of the journey.

Among others who came under Idyl's gaze, was a well-formed, exquisitely-dressed dandyish individual, whom everybody called Rosebud Rob.

His was the appearance and genuine make-up of a sport. His garments were elegant, both in quality and fit. The patent-leathers upon his feet, the flashing diamond upon his shirt-front, together with the white slouch hat upon his head, and numerous other appointments, including the cable-chain of gold, which was strung several times across his vest-front, all added to his appearance as that of one of those individuals occasionally encountered in the mines, and dubbed by the miners as "sports."

The handsome, mustached face of the Sport, with its self-reliant expression, in whose hidden meaning were courage and resolution, and the keen dark eyes, with their magnetic influence, all attracted the attention of Idyl, from the instant she had caught sight of him.

His movements were easy and graceful, and his bearing cool and fearless; and, by the way, these four requisites go far toward making the ideal man of the true western girl's choice.

In Rosebud Rob the Angel of the Gulch saw much to secretly admire, even though to her he was but a total stranger.

Her thoughts were upon him, as was her gaze, when there came a loud, bawling shout through the bar-room, and a brawny giant of a fellow pushed his way roughly through the crowd toward where the girl-miner was standing.

"Hooray!" he bellowed, at the top of his brazen lungs, with a broad oath, "who sez Cascade City hain't got purty weemin? Whar's that same galoot as durst say thet thar ain't purty angels hyar in thet hemisfeer? I'm Cross-eyed Mike Gasket, pilgrims, ef ye wantter know who I be; I'm ther man who keeps tally o' his conquests o' death an' luv wif a conductor's bell-punch—the same pestiferous varmint who ther 'Shian papers called a junior Brigham Young. An' when I roar ev'ry galoot's a-tremblin'. Jest a bit ago, sum one whispered thet thar warn't nary a purty female bird in ther diggin's. Hooray! whar's ther man now? Jest feastyer eyes on thet leetle baby yonder, my royal Bengal tigers. Jest score et down, how sweet she aife, will ye?"

And the giant bully stood glaring at Idyl, with a wolfish, greedy gleam in his eyes, that sent a thrill of terror through her frame, and caused her to tremble violently.

"Oh, my! how purty!" the man with the bell-punch continued, licking his hairy chops with an enormous tongue, as though he were anticipating a feast upon the girl, with her exquisite beauty of face and form. "Feller-citizens, I'm a supreme judge o' weemin's beauty, an' my bell-punch hes scored more conquests than that o' any galoot in these hayr hills. All I hev ter do ar' ter kiss a woman, an' she ar' henceforth a worshiper o' my beauty ferever, you bet! An' ef ye don't b'lieve et, jest watch me fetch thet leetle heifer yonder ter time."

A cheer went up from the giant's backers, as, with a hitch at his breeches, he spat on his hands, and advanced a step toward Idyl.

But it was only a step!

"Stop!" she cried, suddenly leveling a pistol at his heart; "stop, you big wretch! One step more, and, as God is my judge, you shall have the whole contents of my revolver!"

"Stop, you cross-eyed son of a buzzard!" cried a second ringing voice, and Rosebud Rob pushed through the crowd and stood by Idyl's side, his arms folded across his chest, but a handsome revolver, nevertheless, clutched in either hand. "If you want to kiss anybody, come and chaw a piece out of my lip!"

"Hip! hooray! them's my sentiments, too," cried a third voice, and the well-known face and figure of Baltimore Bess was ranked on the defensive. "Come along, ye cross-eyed kangaroo, ef yer anxious ter test our metal! Thar never war a single knave as ked beat a full hand like ours."

"Oh, ho! thet's yer game, eh?" the giant growled, seeing several of the miners step over. "Waal, we'll see about thet. I ain't fer fightin' a hull regiment, but ef any o' ye valiant pilgrims want ter step out an' measure length wif me fer cash, why thar's no flunk in me, you bet!"

"Do you mean that for me?" the Sport demanded, fastening the rosebud more securely in his button-hole.

"Perzactly fer ye," the giant replied, with a leer. "No more fun would I luv than ter scrunch ye all up inter hash, an' toll my bell-punch over yer funeral remains."

"Then if you'll step outside, I allow that I am most happy to accommodate you," Rosebud Rob said, coolly.

"Don't!—oh, don't fight! please," Idyl cried, in sudden alarm, tugging at the Sport's arm. "Don't fight that great monster. He will kill you. Oh! how can I forgive myself for getting you into this trouble?"

"Trouble, lady? Why, you are not in the least to blame—and as for the trouble, 'tis *fun* instead of trouble, I assure you. I have had my eye on this tough for some time. He is guilty of many crimes, and the sooner he ceases to exist as a ruffian, the better for the safety of the people!"

He then turned to Cross-eyed Mike.

"I am ready, you big booby. I guess it is light enough outside for our purpose. Get your rifle, and I'll join you, directly!"

"Hold up yer horses!" the giant roared. "I hain't a-goin' ter grip no shutin'-iron, ner nuthin' like et, I tell ye. Ther rib-ticklin' carver is my holt, ef ye please!"

"Very well!" Rosebud Rob replied, calmly. "I am equally handy with it. But, as you have chosen the weapons, where it was my place, permit me to say which way the fighting shall be done?"

"Yas, go ahead," Gasket replied, with a brutal chuckle. "I don't keer w'ich way, so long's I git one pass at ye. Thet will settle ther debate, an' I'll ring my bell-punch o' death, fer ther sixtieth time!"

The punch in question was a nickel-plated affair, with two thumb-springs, each of which when pressed, rung a bell, within, and registered one, upon a dial. It was similar to those used upon many of the street-car lines in our large cities, and was worn by the ruffian, strung across his breast, making a peculiar ornament.

Every time he took a human life, as he had in scores of instances, the ruffian was credited with ringing the bell. Upon the outside was the inscription—"Death."

He seemed to take an inhuman pride in the possession of his bloody record; as Jake Johnson had said, nearly every one with whom he came in contact feared him.

Nearly every one shuddered, when he announced his desire to complete his third score of deadly conquests.

There was something horrible, even to the roughest of the spectators, that a man should brag of the human lives he had taken.

Rosebud Rob did not shudder, but a feeling of utter loathing and hatred for the human brute, entered his heart, to be succeeded by a fixed resolve.

"As we are to use knives for this contest, we will remain in this room, gentlemen," he said, coolly. "Please pass to one side of the room, so that none of you may get hurt. Sir Tough, you will place your back against one end of the room, with me on the opposite end. The distance between us is about twelve yards, I should say. You are to be provided with five knives, and I with an equal number. At a given signal by the bar-tender, who is a disinterested party, we will hurl the knives at each other, with the intent, of course, to kill. I trust the spectators will see that there is fair play. Both men must stand up to the work, or be held up, until the best man has hurled his last weapon."

A deathlike silence reigned in the bar-room, at the conclusion of the Sport's words.

Every man stood leaning forward, with expectation written upon his face, and bated breath, awaiting the issue.

Cross-eyed Mike glared at the Sport a moment, half-admiringly; then turned with a fierce, ugly laugh, and threw off his jacket.

"I'm ther huckleberry fer thet kind o' bizness!" he said, grimly. "Ef ye wantter see sum high old fun, feller-citizens, ye want ter watch me split open ther skull o' thet scurpious galoot wif ther rosebud fastened inter his buttonhole. I kin do et, as I kin chaw ven'son, w'ich ye know I ken do thet same."

The space was cleared, as directed by Rosebud Rob.

Knives, to the number of five to each, were procured from the spectators.

Before taking his position, Rosebud Rob glanced keenly about him—the longest, perhaps, into the pretty, scared face of Idyl Abbey.

The girl-miner stood on one side, with very little color in her cheeks, and a tremor agitating every muscle.

She dropped her gaze beneath the strange, inquiring one of the Sport. When she glanced up again he had turned, and placed his back against the eastern wall of the bar-room.

Cross-eyed Mike had done the same, and stood with a knife in either hand, while three others were stuck in his belt.

The bartender had mounted the bar; every man, nearly, in the room had drawn a weapon, to enforce fair play.

Baltimore Bess stood near to Idyl, and, as she saw the white face, hastened to give assurance.

"Don't git skeered, little gal, fer thar ain't no harm goin' ter cum ter the Sport, an' don't ye fergit et. A tough customer in battle, ar' thet same Rosebud, an' I'll bet high he sp'iles the beauty o' thet brute, kerslap!"

"Thank you for your assurance. But it is terrible to see men fight."

"Pshaw!" Bess said, with a toss of her head. "Thet shows ye're timid an' weak-minded. Thet's thar way wi' ther most o' ther female sex. I war thet way, sum, myself, until I put on ther breeches, an' made a citizen o' myself."

"I thought myself brave, a little, but you seem to have no fear, at all."

"Ha! ha! w'at would I fear—these galoots about hyar? Nary a time! They don't cum hankerin' around me fer fight, long, afore thar's work fer an undertaker."

"Gents!" cried the barkeeper, standing to his full height, with a pair of large-calibre revolvers in hand, "aire ye ready fer ther sermon ter begin?"

"All ready heer!" the giant announced, with a coarse chuckle.

"Ditto here!" Rosebud Rob assented, coolly.

"Kareet! step one pace forward, so as yer arms kin hev full play!"

The order was obeyed.

"Now, right hands raised, ready, to hurl a knife apiece!"

The right hands were raised, and the heavy hunting knives poised for the hurling, according to each man's notion. Then, there was a breathless pause, of several minutes duration.

Simmonds, the barkeeper, gazed over the crowd of expectant faces below—saw that every man had drawn a weapon, to insure fair play.

"One!" he cried, suddenly and sharply—"let 'em drive when I say three, gents. *Tuo!* take keer - THREE!"

The words were barely formed in sound, when there was a sudden move of two right arms, and the weapons of the contestants went hurtling through the air with an ominous whiz.

Ha! a frightful howl of pain comes from the cross-eyed giant, and he leaps about like an infuriated wild beast.

The keen-bladed knife of the Sport has neatly shaved off the right ear of his opponent, close to the skull, and then buried itself in the logs of the wall. While a shout goes up from the spectators, as Rosebud Rob is seen standing erect, unhurt, and as cool as an iceberg, to all appearances.

Gasket's knife had gone wide of its mark.

"Order!" roared Simmonds, from on top of the bar. "Git back ter yer place, Cross-eye, or you're a dead man. Some one stanch the flow o' blood, please!"

Ready hands bandaged up the giant's wound, and beneath the gaze of a dozen or more revolver muzzles, he covered back to his end of the room, and drew a second knife, with a string of curses.

"Get ready!" cried Simmonds. "Each man has an equal show, an' I'm goin' ter see the contract kerried out ter ther letter, ef ther old constitoochin' knows herself. Don't ye second ther motion, feller-citizens?"

A shout of approval went up from the crowd.

Baltimore Bess was in ecstasies, while Idyl stood with a pale face, and dilated eyes. She had never witnessed such a terrible battle; she could not speak; when she would have left the room, her limbs refused to move.

"Hurray! warn't thet did skientific, now?" Bess cried, excitedly. "I tell ye w'at, thar's nothin' like bein' a man. I wouldn't be a woman no quicker'n I'd chaw my own head off, you bet. Just watch thet Sport, now. He's gittin' ready fer ernuther fling. Ten ter one he cuts thet tough's head clean squar' off."

The words startled Idyl back into herself once more; her limbs no longer refused to move. She glided to the side of the Sport, and laid one hand upon his arm, appealingly.

"Don't!" she said, in a low, tremulous voice—"don't kill the man—for my sake!"

"For your sake!" Rosebud Rob said, gazing down into the pretty face, with sudden admiration in his eyes. "For your sake, miss. You must have some punktier passion, then, fer sech cowards as thet cuss, yonder."

"No! no! I despise him, even more than you do. But I don't want murder done here, in Cascade City."

"But, it wouldn't be murder, I reckon, to drop that galoot!"

"Yes, it would. Promise me not to kill him, tonight."

"I promise!" the Sport said, watching the girl, as she hurried back to the side of Baltimore Bess.

"Cum, young feller wi' ther rosebud—are ye ready?" Simmonds cries.

"Quite ready!" the Sport replied.

"An' ye, Cross-eyes!"

"Give's the word!" the giant said, with a voice like a bull's roar.

He had poised his knife, and was evidently counting upon a sure stroke for victory.

"Ready, gents!" cried Simmonds, briskly. "One, two, three!"

The word had scarcely passed his lips, ere the knives left the hands of the duelists, and went whizzing ominously through the air.

Every one, perhaps, except the contestants, shuddered, as the missiles of death shot forward.

A wild, awful yell came from the giant, while the crowd broke into a simultaneous shout of astonishment.

What did it mean? Was the cool Sport, who stood unhurt at his end of the room—was he possessed of the art of witchcraft? It would seem so.

None such knife-throwing had these denizens of the Black Hills ever witnessed before.

For this last shot was no less than wonderful.

The Sport, upon hurling his weapon, had given it a send-off, something after the manner in which the native of the South Sea Islands hurls his boomerang; it had made a peculiar curve in its flight, and the sharp blade, in passing close to the giant's face, had completely clipped off the extreme end of his nose!

CHAPTER VI.

OLD FOES MEET—ROSEBUD ROB, AGAIN.

Yes! it was even so!

The man with the bell-punch was minus one ear, and the end of his nose, of which he was ever proud, as he had got it colored as finely as ever the jolly German colored his meerschaum.

And with howls and oaths of despair and rage, the giant, blood-blinded, as it were, drew another knife from his belt, and rushed savagely toward the Sport.

But, quickly, a number of miners blockaded his path, with leveled revolvers, and forced him back against the wall.

"In God's name, w'at d'ye mean?" the ruffian gasped, mopping away the blood with his shirt sleeve. "Ar' ye goin' ter make me stan' an' let thet devil sp'ile my beauty, forever?"

"Thet's ther ticket, peractly!" assured Bill Simmonds. "Ye begun ther amosement, by pickin' on Miss Idyl, yonder, an' ye've got to stand yer grounds, 'til the Sport slings three more knives, you bet yer boots! We're goin' ter hev things conducted on ther squar', hyer in Cascade City!"

"I cave—give in licked!" the giant growled. "So let up. I don't keer about bein' planted fer sum time ter cum yet!"

"Ken't help thet!" Simmonds replied. "Ther contract war fer five knives apiece. Ther fust man who says 'draw-poker' gits ther hull contents o' my six-shooters—don't care ef it be ther giant or ther Sport. One or 't'other hes got ter kiss ther floor afore he kin quit!"

Under these stern rules, it looked evident that the duel must be continued, and that there was a prospect for a funeral, in the giant's case. The men drew their weapons and took their positions.

At the word they let fly.

Cross-Eyed Mike's weapon just grazed the left shoulder of the Sport.

The knife of Rosebud Rob went wide of its mark, and a murmur from the spectators was sufficient guarantee that they did not believe the Sport had made the miss without a purpose.

Again the duelists took their stand.

Again they hurled the knives, Gasket's weapon carrying away a piece of the Sport's coat-sleeve; while the latter's knife went quivering into the log wall, not an inch away from the one previously thrown.

But one knife apiece now remained to be thrown.

Cross-Eyed Mike grasped his, with a chuckle.

"I'm jest gittin' my hand in!" he said, fiercely. "I'll split the cuss's skull open this time, an' then gobble up thet bit o' feminine kaliker over yander, arter I've tolled my bell-punch!"

Pretty Idyl shrunk nearer to Baltimore Bess, as she heard the ruffian's threat and caught his gloating glance.

"Don't be skeered, leetle one!" Bess whispered, reassuringly. "Ten ter one Bobby puts in his work beanchful this time. 'Twixt you an' me, I'll bet thar's nary a pilgrim in these hyar mines as kin lay over thet same leetle Sport."

The men took their relative positions; the word was given by Simmonds; the missiles flew through the air swiftly.

There was a groan and a heavy fall at the giant's end of the room. The butt of the knife-hilt had struck him endwise, between his organs of sight, and ended the duel, as had been the intention of the Sport, for he cast a contemptuous glance at the fallen bully, and turned away.

A shout of deafening applause rent the air, and a crowd surrounded the Sport, with expressions of admiration and congratulation.

Idyl now took the opportunity to slip from the room, and run around to her own part of the cabin.

She found Sir Tom Somerset sitting in the doorway, but Old Elk, the hermit, was nowhere in sight.

"Where is papa?" she demanded, breathlessly, pausing in front of the young baronet, as he did not arise to let her pass.

"He retired some time ago, I believe, Miss Idyl," was the reply. "I suppose you know it's past his bedtime."

"No! what time is it? I was so—"

"Engrossed in a low saloon brawl, that you had forgotten yourself," he finished, with biting sarcasm.

"It is twelve o'clock, Miss Abbey—high time, I should say, for you to be in bed!"

A flush of resentment went rioting over her pretty face.

"Sir? You use strange words—and you a guest, at that!"

"A paying one, however," he returned, lightly. "I am under no obligations to either you or Mr. Abbey, except for the first few days of my stay here."

"Why do you remain?" she demanded, suddenly, turning the full power of her eyes upon him. "Why do you remain here, where you cannot derive much enjoyment?"

"I remain because I want you," he replied, in a low, passionate voice; "because I am determined to win you yet, and carry you away when I go."

"Then, let me dissipate any such a hope," she replied, coldly. "I can never be anything more to you than a friend. You had better know this now, than later. Go back to your English home, and forget that you ever met Idyl Abbey!"

"No! no! I cannot, Idyl—"

"You must, I say. You are only making yourself miserable by remaining here. I will plainly and candidly tell you, once and for all—I do not love you, and can never be your wife."

She pushed by him then and entered the cabin, leaving behind her one of the most wretched beings in Cascade City, unless we were to make allowance for the Man-With-the-Bell-Punch, who had suffered the loss of his ear and nose-tip at the hands of Rosebud Rob.

But Sir Tom was not the one to be put off lightly. He knew that there was worth to a woman like Idyl Abbey, and that the possession of her was, in every sense of the word, worth working for.

On the following morning, Idyl was up with the first streak of dawn in the east, and after a hasty breakfast, was out at her claims, working away in golden sands.

The day was one of those mild Indian summer days, which serve to charm and lull the senses. A misty haze hung above the gulch, through which the sun penetrated mildly. The birds were caroling sweetly in the mountain chaparral, and all nature seemed waking with a new joy—a sort of temporary inspiration in the dying of the year.

The valley was thronged, to-day, thronged with would-be miners and speculators, with roughs and sharpers, whose business was doubtful, at the best.

The girl-miner accomplished but little, in the way of washing out wealth, for she was repeatedly bothered by persistent inquirers, who were eager to procure a slice out of the golden cake.

General expressions of disappointment, were heard on either hand.

The gulch was no bonanza, after all the excitement.

Two men were talking the matter over, as they stood near where Idyl was working.

"The girl, here, has got the best part, evidently," said Lord Byron Cavendish, watching her with a bold, insolent stare, which caused her to feel uneasy—for she knew that his eyes were turned upon her, even though she did not look at him. "The girl's got the best claim, and consequently there is a poor show for the rest of the fellows."

"Unless their digging results in a bigger discovery," replied the second individual, a Mr. Charles Devere, of Custer City.

"I would give a good deal to possess this claim!" Cavendish muttered, lowering his tone. "I could then get back some of the money I have lost, lately, at the gaming-table. Is there no way we could dethrone this girl, and get the claim in our possession? A couple of clever villains, like you and I, ought to manage it, all right."

"Hardly," Devere replied. "If the girl was here first, and staked off her own, she can hold it, in spite of the—the devil!" with a sardonic laugh.

"Have you learned her name, yet?"

"I believe they call her Idyl."

"Idyl! a strange name; likewise, a deuced pretty girl."

"Yes, remarkably so."

"Could we not persuade her to sell out her claim at a nominal figure, do you think?"

Devere shook his head.

"She's no fool, I'll guarantee," he said.

Lord Cavendish, however, had a concealed notion that American women were possessed of an intellect only a trifle above the beasts of the forest.

He regarded them as beneath his serious notice, unless there was a bargain to be made.

Of Idyl Abbey, however, he had a little more elevated opinion. She was unusually pretty—perhaps had money saved up; and that was an item of decided advantage in the Britisher's eyes.

"Ahem! Is this claim for sale, young lady?" he ventured to ask finally, in his softest tones.

"Not for sale!" Idyl replied, briefly, for she liked not the appearance of the baronet or his companion. "I have answered this same question for a matter of ten or fifteen times to-day."

"Oh! well, you needn't be so independent about it!" Cavendish said, insolently. "I've seen Indian squaws twice as polite as you."

"Sir!" and Idyl flushed hotly, "if you come here to annoy me, you are unwelcome. You will please take your departure!"

"Eh? Go at the order of a mere chit of a girl like you?" his lordship exclaimed. "Perhaps you do not know who I am, young woman?"

"Well, now, then, who are you?" Idyl demanded, picking up her rifle and leaning upon it, while she surveyed the two men coolly. "Go ahead and give us a full account of yourself."

Cavendish uttered a polite English oath, while Devere simply whistled.

It was a picture neither of them could help admiring.

"A-ah! ahem! my pert miss, my name is Cavendish, at your service—Lord Byron Cavendish, of London."

"Very well!" the Angel of the Gulch replied, coolly. "I see nothing of special importance in that fact. You're no better than any one else!"

"You shall find out about that!" Cavendish raved, his face growing florid with mortification. "Come! let's go back to the hotel, Devere. I've a thought in my mind concerning this girl, which I want to whisper in your ear. Good-day, Miss Independence—*au revoir*!"

Idyl watched them walk away, her eyes dilating widely.

"They are a pair of villains," she mused, a feeling of uneasiness stealing over her. "Cavendish? ah! that was the name of Sir Tom Somerset's fellow-tourist."

She went on with her work, but it was with a feeling of unrest.

Lord Cavendish and the man, Devere, went back to the "howtel," as Mrs. Matrevis's establishment was characterized upon a creaking sign up over the door.

"The girl's a regular spitfire!" the Britisher growled, in vexation.

"She rather cooled you off," Devere laughed. "Takes a woman to make a man feel that he isn't o' much account, anyhow."

"Hang the women! I want that spot of land, and I'm going to have it by hook or by crook! Who is the girl's father, and where does she live, I wonder?"

"There's her father, now," and the man from Custer City pointed a short distance away, where Old Elk was sitting in his arm-chair, beneath the willow, engaged in smoking his grimy pipe. "That's her father, an' she lives w' him in the cabin, I reckon."

Cavendish gazed closely at the hermit as he approached nearer, and finally he gave a violent start, and an expression of incredulity came over his features.

"Jason Abbey! Can it be possible?" he cried, leaping forward with an oath.

"Ay!" the old man cried, seizing one of his crutches, and raising it on the defensive; "Jason Abbey! Keep back, Ronald Dorchester! keep back! or I will dash your brains out, as old as I am, and not half the man I was ten years ago!"

Cavendish, *alias* Dorchester, laughed sneeringly.

"Don't fear, old fellow! I wouldn't touch a hair of your head, were every hair a golden chain. Devere, I'll see you later."

Devere bowed. He recognized a polite hint for him to be gone, and he accordingly strolled toward the cascade, to pass away the time.

After he had gone, Lord Cavendish brought a chair from inside the cabin and seated himself in front of the hermit, just out of reach of the oaken crutch.

A wonderful change had come over the hermit in the last few minutes. He had straightened up from his habitual bent position, with tense muscles and clenched hands.

His face, though shaded by a grayish pallor, was resolute in its expression, and his eyes had a steely glint that they had not possessed before.

"Well!" Cavendish said, with a complacent smirk, as he stroked his luxuriant side-whiskers. "It seems that I have found your hiding-place at last, when I was least thinking of you. Ha! ha! your surprise must have been about equal to mine."

"On the contrary, I have been expecting this," the hermit replied, calmly—so calmly as to cause the visitor to glance at him the second time. "I had been looking for you during the past two years, knowing there was no gold excitement without its influx of blacklegs and unprincipled knaves."

"Ha! ha! a good way of brushing a fly off of my nose, isn't it? Well, well, fire away, old man. I can stand any amount of verbal abuse. By the way, I see you have grown old in the last decade—older than I, even, albeit our ages used to be the same."

"Yes, grown old," was the slow reply; "but it is better to be nigh unto a glorious hereafter, than to have one's soul burdened with crime, Ronald Dorchester!"

"Indeed! Is that so? But, my dear Abbey, refrain from calling me Dorchester. My name, for the past few years, has been Lord Byron Cavendish. You see, an old uncle died and bequeathed me his wealth and title. Not but what Dorchester was ever an honorable name; but, you see, it seems a little odd after all my lordly career."

The hermit somehow managed to articulate a faint laugh of scorn at this juncture.

"I see you are the same conceited scoundrel of old!" he said. "But come! I do not care to prolong this interview. State your business, and go!"

"I shall take my time to that," the other announced, decidedly. "I propose to have a social chat with you."

"You have a social chat with me!" the hermit cried, his voice trembling with rising anger; "you, who stole away my bride from her first-born child? I placed my curses upon your heads then, as I do now. Because I won a woman you would have ruined, and made her my wife, Ronald Dorchester, you vowed to wreak vengeance upon me and mine. You have done so—what more do you want?"

"I want a continuation of the same, unless we can come to a settlement!" the Englishman replied, with an affected yawn. "You do not ask about your wife, Jason, as I supposed you would?"

"Ask about her?" the hermit hissed, with an intense bitterness of tone—"she whom you enticed

away from her husband and child! I have no wife, you accursed villain. The hour that Hellice Abbey left my roof, she ceased to be any thing to me, or the child she bore me!"

"The girl down the gulch, yonder, is that child, I presume?"

"The same!"

"I should have judged so. She seems to possess many of your wife's traits of character. For instance, at her age in life, I see that she has got so far advanced that a couple of roughs were fighting over her, in the bar-room, last evening!"

"A couple of roughs, sir?" exclaimed a cool, cynical voice, and a trim dandyish figure stepped around the corner of the cabin. "Allow me to correct your mistake, and at the same time tender you an invitation to meet me, at your earliest convenience. A 'rough' implies that which is of no credit to a thoroughbred gentleman, and I thought it might be just as well to have a pistol debate on the subject, now, as at any later period!"

Cavendish uttered an oath, and leaped to his feet. Before him stood the sportive notoriety, Rosebud Rob—the same cool sharp, whose name was being handled in awe by the gossip miners, wherever his advent had taken place.

A flush of malicious anger dyed the florid countenance of the Englishman to a more apoplectic hue, as he surveyed the Sport.

"What do you mean, you accursed eavesdropper?" he growled, savagely. "I'll teach you manners!"

"My challenge, just now, would seem to imply that I was willing to take a few lessons from you, my lord!" Rosebud Rob replied, satirically.

"What! I fight you?" Cavendish gasped, as if seized with sudden horror, at the thought. "Why, you insignificant puppy, I'd disdain to touch the point of a weapon with you—I would, 'pon my honor. You see, I never fight, except with g'ntlemen!"

"Indeed? Then you are afraid to fight with me, eh?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why don't you accept the challenge, you cowardly sneak?"

Cavendish trembled with suppressed rage. To be called a "cowardly sneak" was the height of insult; yet he was aware that he must not fight with the cool Sport if he would preserve his own life. He had witnessed the strange duel of last night, and he had no desire to measure skill with so wonderful a marksman.

"You shall be satisfied," Cavendish gritted, "but not now. Another time will do just as well."

"Certainly," the Sport replied, with a quiet smile.

"I'll give you time to square up your earthly accounts, and to determine which way you would prefer to be sent off. Until then, I bid you an affectionate adieu."

And, with a mocking laugh, the dandy of the mines walked away, whistling a strain from La Sonnambula in a peculiarly piercing tone.

Cavendish watched him with a black frown for several minutes, then turned upon the hermit, with a sarcastic chuckle.

CHAPTER VII.

A HUSBAND-HUNTER—THE HUNTED BARONET.

"THAT'S the individual who took the part of your daughter, friend Jason," he said, resuming his seat. "No doubt you are deeply impressed with his flashy appearance and apparent bravado!"

"At the very least, he has evidently more manly principles than you!" the hermit replied, bitterly. "Ronald Dorchester, tell me what you want—then go. Your presence is gall and wormwood to me."

"That is why I am delighted to stay with you," the villain replied; "but, as I do not wish to be unduly hasty in worrying you out of the world, I'll state my business and go. We may as well be friends as enemies. I bear you no particular ill-will, and I am sure you could learn to love me as a son-in-law, in due time."

"What?" the hermit gasped, half starting from his seat. "Are you mad, man?"

"Perfectly sane, I assure you. Your girl is a pretty lass, and would make me a good wife, no doubt."

"Stop! 'Tis certainly madness to discuss such an idea, Ronald Dorchester. Before I'd see my Idyl wedded to a scoundrel like you, I'd cut her pure white throat with my own half-palsied hands!"

"Ha! ha! bravely spoken, my dear Abbey; but indicative of a weak mind nevertheless. Were there an asylum for the demented within easy reach of this desolate spot, I should certainly see to your removal there at once. By-the-by, do not get excited, but consider matters from a rational standpoint, and when I return I shall expect to find you willing to comply with all of my requests!"

"No! Ronald Dorchester!" the hermit hissed, as the baronet arose and walked away. "You'll never convert me into a tool to serve your purposes. My experience with you has been too bitter—too bitter—for me not to be on my guard."

Cavendish, as we will continue to call him, walked around the cabin to the eastern side, where was the entrance to Mrs. Matrevis's saloon. He was on the eve of entering, when a touch upon the arm caused him to wheel about, with a grunt of inquiry.

But an expression of mingled curiosity and disgust came over his features when he saw who it was.

It was the eccentricity of whom Jake Johnson had spoken to Idyl—the husband-hunter, Mrs. George Washington Bounce.

Of all females she was, perhaps, the most eccentric and ludicrous-appearing of any in the mines.

What little of her features were to be seen were sharp and angular, with a hooked nose, sharp, bead-

like eyes, and a mouth of broad-gauge dimensions. In addition, her countenance was liberally washed with that article of the feminine toilet known as "illy-white," and the cheeks tinged with rouge. An olden-time "sky-scraper" bonnet, surrounded her face and covered her head, being plentifully adorned with artificial roses and loud ribbons. In form she was long and lank, and her dress, of huge-figured calico, with something like two yards of train behind, and a scant red shawl over her shoulders, gave her a strange, grotesque appearance.

And what such a creature could want with him was beyond Lord Cavendish's powers of comprehension, to say the least.

"Well, woman, what is it?" he growled, gruffly.

"Shure an' phat is it?" the woman replied. "Faix, an' there's nary a woman in the town bether than meself, ef I do say it."

"Hang your nonsense. Tell me what you want, or go along with your accursed baggage."

"A divil a bit o' baggage hev I at all, yer honor. It's a poor lone widdy I am, shure, who be buffetin' the say of adversity, wid nary a hope for ther future except to find a foine g'ntleman to take the place lift vacant in me bladn' heart by the dith o' Mike Maloney. Och! wurra! a divil uv a foine husband was that same Michael, but now he's a hod-carrier up forninst the angels!"

"In the name of Heaven, woman, how [does this concern me? I never saw you before!"]

"Shure, but the same made make no difference, at all. I'm a poor widdy, an' ye be a bachelor. Take me to your arms, along with all ther luv ov the Maloneys, for centuries to come."

"Nonsense! This woman is mad. Get away, you Irish vagrant!" and giving her a push, he managed to dive into the tavern, and escape to his room.

While outside, Mrs. G. W. Bounce, glared around her for another victim, upon whom to pounce.

Rosebud Rob was standing a short distance away, conversing with Idyl. Seeing which Mrs. B. made for him unceremoniously.

"Aha! me darlint, its meself as hev found yez!" she exclaimed, with a radiant grin, as she endeavored to throw herself into the Sport's arms. "Shure, an' its huntin' I've bin these menny days fer yez. Divil a bit will I give ye up now."

"Confound it, what do you mean, you old lunatic? I'm no darlint o' yours!" Rosebud Rob replied, pushing her away, at arm's length. "Who are you, anyhow?"

"Och! divil a soul knows bether than meself who I be. Mrs. General George Washington Bounce, at yer service, tho' it's formerly the wife av Mike Maloney that I was. Shure Mike he died from a carry-in' the hod, he did, an' thin along comes an American spalpeen, bad luck to him, an' he fluthers one eye at meself, an' he sez, sez he, the omadhaun: 'Cum wid me, Biddy, ye flower av tha Emerald sod, to that land av the frae American, an' be the wife av General George Washington; shure it's a divil av a foine time we'll have, ontirely!' Poor deluded fule that I was, I kim over the big puddle, an' we landed at Castle Garden, one mornin' in the month av August."

"Siz the General to me, thin:

"Biddy, me treasure, jist be after loanin' me the five hundred that yez got from the sale av the wee cot on the ould sod, an' w'ile I run forninst the bank, ye'll be rollin' away to me palace, on the avenue. An', shure, I smelt nothing, at all, an' he tuk the money, put me into a cab containin' a man, wid brass buttons on his coat—his liveried servant I belave he called 'im—an' furst I know'd I was in a place tha called the Tombs—an' they sed as how I was 'rested, bedad, for sthalin'. An' when I told the spalpeens that I was Mrs. General George Washington, tha mother av me counthry, they all laughed, an' a big polacemont told me to 'bounce'. I 'bounced'! but everywhere I went, an' told 'em who I was, they'd simply say 'bounce,' an' it's meself as kim to tha final conclusion that 'Bounce' must be a parth o' my name ontirely."

"Ha! ha! this is rich!" Rosebud Rob cried, laughing heartily, as did Idyl, for in the relation of her narrative, the "widdier" had adhered to the broad Irish twang, and had pitched her voice to a sharp, indignant key.

"My good woman, what became of the 'general' and what brings you out here, in the mines?"

"Och! wurra! shure, an' they told me tha same 'general' was a noted—corkleg, I think tha called it, an' that he had swindled me out o' me money. Jest as if I didn't know the same! But divil a bit keered I. There was niver a Maloney, nor the son av a Maloney, noor tha wife of a Maloney, as would cry forninst spilt milk; an' I set forth in s'arch of anther husband ter take tha place av poor Mike Maloney, that is deceased."

"And you have been unsuccessful, so far, I take it?" the Sport asked.

"Faix, an' it's meself that has, that same. Divil a mon hev I met wid a heart in him at all, or an eye for three beauty av tha desolate, soul yearnin' widdy av George W. Bounce."

"Well! well, this is really sinful, that no one can appreciate your manifold charms. Did you try the man you met at the saloon door, a bit ago?"

"Shure, an' there's nary a mon in the camp I haven't offered myself to. But, they all say 'git out,' or, 'bounce, ye Irish vagrant,' an' sure it's a sick ould place, ontirely."

"You must not be discouraged!" Rob assured, a sparkle in his eye. "The man you met at the door is an English lord, and no doubt if you push your case, you can strike a tender chord in his heart, and the ultimate result will be, that you discard the American name of Mrs. General George Washington Bounce, for the aristocratic English title of Lady Byron Cavendish!"

"Arrah! an' do yez raelly think that same, yer honer?"

"There can be no doubt of it, my dear woman. Cavendish seems to have a passion for comely women, and your case bids fair to win, if you only hang to your work with the perseverance of a bull-dog. Take my advice—don't give him a minute's peace until he makes you his wife. As an encouragement, if you succeed, I'll give you a hundred dollars out of my own pocket!"

"Och! now, but it's foolin' wid me ye be, yer honer!" and Mrs. G. W. B.'s face became gloriously illuminated.

"Not a bit of it. You do your work, and I'll stand by my word, as sure's my name is Rosebud Rob, 'a man to suit all circumstances.'"

"Thin, by the hand of the Virgin Mary! It's niver a day shall go by but I pop the momentous question to the loikes ov his lordship!" cried Mrs. Bounce, decidedly, and the next minute she had wheeled about, and was pacing rapidly off toward the hotel.

When she was out of hearing, Rosebud Rob burst into a shout of laughter, which lasted for several minutes.

"You'll see fun hereafter," he said at last. "If I do not mistake that woman's metal, she'll make it red-hot for that British rascal."

"Do you think this strange creature a woman, sir?" Idyl asked.

"Eh? not a woman? Do you really believe it, miss?"

"I asked you if you thought her such, sir. I passed no opinion."

"True. But—but—hang it! she looks and acts like one. I don't believe but what she's pure quill!"

"Perhaps you are right. But you will have to ex-

"A fortune?"

"Yes. Had you not heard the little story about the old hermit's hidden treasure? They say he's been washing out gold in this valley for the past ten years, and that he's got it hidden away, by the bagful."

"Ha! I had not heard of this. Is there any truth in the report?"

"As to that, I am unable to say. Probably the report would not have originated without some foundation."

The Englishman knitted his brows together, darkly.

"If this be true, Devere, you and I must have that treasure," he said, in a low tone.

"We must first find out where it is secreted, and then the old man must die a seemingly natural death. Then, we can take the girl and the gold, return to the old world, and live like nabobs. How like you the picture?"

"The picture is well enough, if executed right. But, there is the stick. It's easy enough to talk, but not to act. I have just been reading of a notorious villain, at heart, who laid a plan to ruin a young man and get possession of his fortune. He maneuvered like a good fellow, but finally was foiled, and brought to speedy justice, as villains usually are."

"Pooh! if you get your brain full of such nonsense, you may calculate to be defeated. I am no fool to imperil my neck, and consequently, we must work in extra cards, in the game. There's that rough customer they call Cross-Eyed Mike, for example."

"Humph! I judge he is about done for, for the present, what with the loss of an ear and a nose."

"Nevertheless, we could not get a better man to

complaint raised, many a dark threat made, against one man, and that man Joaquin Murieta, Jr.

Since the opening of the new road, and, by the way, the only direct route to the new strike, the travel over it had been considerable, owing to the inflowing of the miners.

No other route was there, without making a detour of twenty or thirty miles, and this was not desirable.

Yet, not a stage—not a person passed over the road, unless he paid toll at the little shanty on the dug-way. Five dollars apiece for each human passing by the gate, was charged, except in the case of Jake Johnson, stage-driver. Why he was left out, no one could rightly guess.

On several occasions there had been resistance on the part of gangs of miners and roughs, against paying such an enormous toll, but when dark-faced Joaquin's whistle had called a score or more of brawny, masked men to his backing, the toll was inevitably forthcoming.

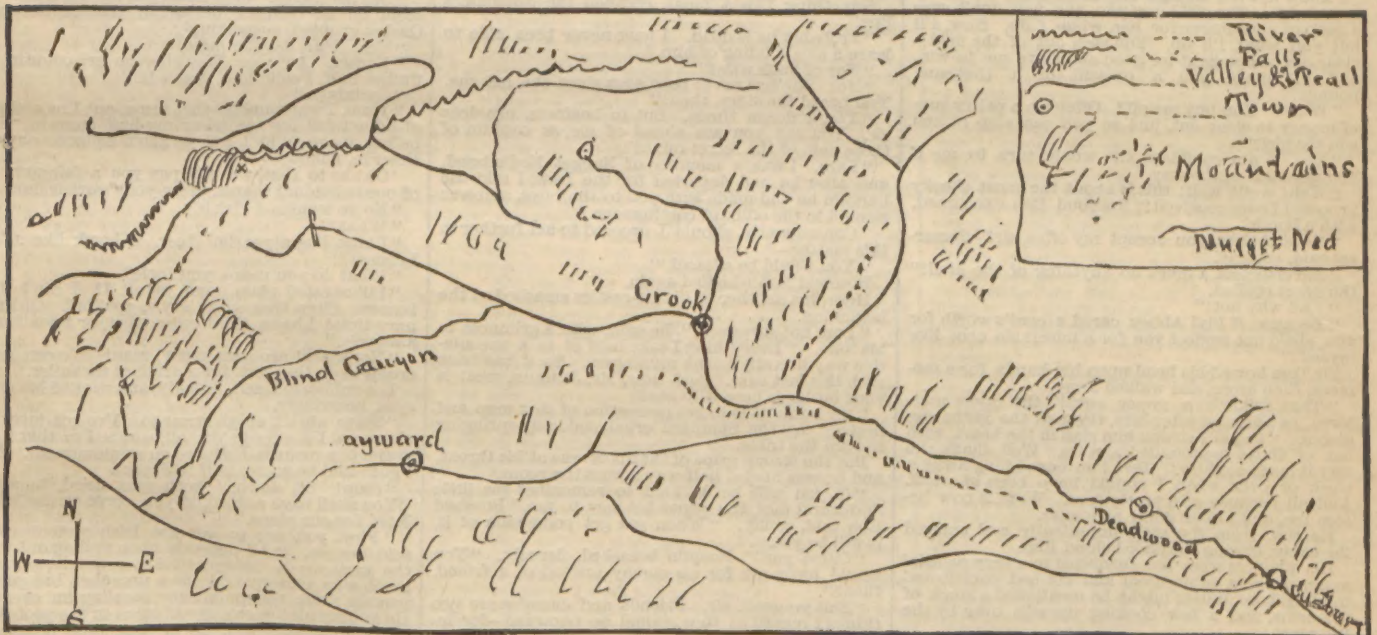
If Joaquin Murieta had constructed the road, why had he not the right to charge each person toll, that passed over it?

This was the concession of a few, but the general verdict of the Cascade-City-ites was that they were being robbed by the highway toll-gate keeper.

And it had been boldly announced that it would be worth the life of this man Joaquin, for him to set his foot within the precincts of that mining town.

Yet, the chief was abroad, at times when he was unexpected.

Byron Cavendish was returning to his hotel, late one night, from a gambling den, down the gulch, when he heard a footstep in his rear, and turned just in time to catch a faint glimpse of a dark figure, which had been following him.



cuse me now. I must go to work, or my day will have been idly spent, for interruptions have been numerous to-day."

"Ah! I will go, then. Pray excuse me for my thoughtless intrusion; it shall not be repeated."

"I did not mean you, sir, particularly, Mr. Mapleton. You I regard as a friend, since you so bravely came to my rescue, and friends and strangers, you know, one cannot afford to grant equal privileges."

Rosebud Rob bowed, but excused himself and sauntered away. He saw that the girl-miner possessed a maidenly modesty, and it was not for him to confuse it by intruding.

After escaping the daughter of Hibernia, Lord Cavendish hastened to his room, which was directly over the saloon, and found Devere there, engaged in reading a yellow-covered novel.

This man from Custer City was in no single particular a great villain. His was an easy nature, and, in his bringing up, he had never been taught what it was to be scrupulous. Anything which offered him the easiest way to attain an easy livelihood was what he liked best, and he had come to Cascade City to "make a stake," without considering how it was to be done. He and Lord Cavendish had met on the way, and, for a stipulate I say, Devere had consented to serve the Britisher.

"Well, my lord, you evidently met an old acquaintance in the hermit down there?" he said, looking up from his book.

"Yes; an old enemy," the baronet replied. "I should as soon have expected to find him here, as I would to find the devil in a church-pulpit. But, as it turns out, it may be a lucky chance that caused me to stumble upon him."

"In respect to the girl?"

"Exactly. She is pretty, and would not grace a palace so badly, after all."

"Especially when she has a princely fortune back of her beauty."

serve us—that is, if we can get him. He has the savage ferocity of a bull-dog, and the memory of a tobacco-fed elephant."

"But a bigger coward at heart, never lived!"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean what I said. He is a coward, especially when he meets such men as that Sport, Rosebud Rob."

"Curse the Sport!" Cavendish growled, with a frown. "He is an obstacle in my path—an obstacle which must be removed."

"You fear him, then?"

"Ay! I'll own that I do. There is only one other living man, whom I fear more."

"Who is that?"

"His name is Joaquin Murieta."

"What! the toll-gate keeper, on the new road?"

"The same. I never go to bed at night, but his revengful face rises before my mind's-eye, like some evil phantom."

"What have you to fear from him, my lord?"

"It matters not, now. Some other time, I'll tell you."

And rising, abruptly, the villain left the room.

A week passed.

Matters at Cascade City had assumed a change of aspect, inasmuch as the population had increased to a couple of hundred souls, and every incoming stage added to this number. The commercially inclined men had arrived, among the rest, and several little stores and saloons had gone up, as well as numerous dwellings.

Evidently, Cascade City was to be a mining town, in earnest, for some paying spots of sand had been found, down the valley, and all available territory had been leased off, at high figures.

But, in the midst of the increasing tide of prosperity, when men could gamble, if they could not mine, themselves rich or poor in a single day—in the midst of all the bustle and excitement, there was many a

With a curse, he snatched a pistol from his belt, and fired; but his only answer was a mocking laugh.

While, the next minute, there was a whiz and a whir, and he uttered a piercing yell, as an arrow tore into the flesh of his right side.

He heard another mocking laugh, and then, a horse dashing rapidly through the valley, and he knew that his assailant was escaping.

Not possessed of the courage to extract the weapon, he staggered on to the bar-room, of Mrs. Matrevis's establishment, where ready hands offered him aid.

And, after the blood had been stanching, and the wound dressed, a piece of paper was discovered wrapped around the shaft of the arrow, and handed to the baronet.

It contained a single line, written in a bold hand, and these were the words:

"The 10th of October. Beware!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"A FRANTIC MOTHER KNOWS NO BARRIER BETWEEN HERSELF AND CHILD."

THE Sport, Rosebud Rob, independent of the accommodations offered by the boarding-house keepers of Cascade City, had reared him a shanty of his own, in the gulch, and kept bachelor's hall.

Since that afternoon when Idyl had spoken of being disturbed in her labors, he had never visited her at her work. But this did not hinder their frequent meeting. The Sport was usually sitting in his doorway, as she passed homeward at the completion of her day's labors, and it was rarely that they did not have a short chat.

After one of these interviews, one evening, Rosebud Rob was not a little surprised to receive an interview from the young baronet, Sir Tom Somerset, who still lingered in the mines, although he was growing pale and thin.

He nodded, carelessly, and dropped upon the grass before the door of the shanty, with a sigh.

Rosebud Rob knew nothing of him, except what he had learned from Idyl, and that was by no means satisfactory.

The girl-miner was ever reserved in her speech. "You are Rosebud Rob, eh?" Sir Tom said, staring straight at the Sport.

"I have the honor of being called that same," was the reply. "In what way can I serve you, sir?"

"There is a way—but of that never mind, at present. I came here, as a man, to ask you a few questions, and I trust you will answer them in a straightforward manner. Will you not?"

"Rest assured on that," Rosebud Rob replied. "Anything in my power which I can do for a suffering fellow-mortals, I always am ready to offer."

"Then, tell me! how much do you care for the girl-miner?"

"Miss Idyl?"

"Exactly. How much do you really care for that girl?"

"See here; ain't you striking out a little too fast? Not being a minstrel-end-man, I don't propose to digest such conundrums as that."

"But you must tell me."

"Well, if I must, supposin' I were to say that I regard her as a very dear friend."

"No more?"

"There you are again, pushin' beyond the boundaries. I told you I regarded her as a very dear friend. If I war dealin' in sentimentalism, an' boasted o' her bein' very dear as a sweetheart, most probably I should hev sed it squar' out."

"Very well. This girl loves you?"

"Phew! What's the matter with you? Are you a kind o' match-maker—a matrimonial huckster fer ther girl, or what?"

"The girl loves you," Sir Tom repeated, coolly. "I know it, even though she never said so, to my knowledge. The girl loves you, and you don't care a snap of your finger for her, while I do. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. You step out of the field—clear out of her sight for good and leave me to win, and I'll make you a present of a thousand pounds!"

"What? You buy me off? Offer me a paltry sum of money to clear out, just so you can step in and win the girl?"

"Yes. I am confident she would turn to me if you were out of the way."

"Well! well! well! this is about the most cheeky proposal I ever received!" Rosebud Rob exclaimed, with a laugh.

"Nevertheless, you accept my offer, sir?" Somerset said, eagerly.

"Nevertheless, I don't do anything of the kind!" the Sport replied.

"And why not?"

"Because, if Idyl Abbey cared a cent's worth for you, she'd not neglect you for a miserable coot like myself!"

Sir Tom bowed his head upon his hands, for a moment, then arose, and walked away.

"That fellow's a goner, sure!" the Sport muttered, as he gazed after him, through the gathering gloom. "Cupid's struck him slap in the heart, with one of those confounded arrows. Well, that's the way it goes, anyhow. Here I've been idling away a week or over, when I should have been at work. And all because of a pretty face. Work is now before me, and I must delay no longer."

He rose from the step, impatiently, and entered the cabin, closing the door behind him.

His quarters were not furnished in a very palatial manner, for a table, stool and cot-bed constituted the furniture, unless might be mentioned a stock of fire-arms, and a few cooking utensils over by the fire-place.

A bull's-eye lantern sat upon the table, and lighted the apartment sufficient for the Sport's purpose.

He first seated himself at the table, after which he drew a package of papers from his pocket.

"Here is the map given me by the Detective-Avenger, Nugget Ned," he muttered, spreading a sheet of paper out before him, "and this is what I want. It is the complicated key to the Secret Mine, which I am the owner of, when I find it. But it's a puzzle to study out. Every time I've tackled it so far, I've got disgusted, and thrown it aside."

On page 9 we give a fac-simile of the rude map, which had been given the Sport, in Deadwood, as related in No. 81, Beadle's Half-Dime Library.

"Now, who in the name of old Harry can make head or tail out of such a mess?" the Sport muttered.

"Here on another paper is the key, according to Nugget Ned's understanding, which far surpasses mine, if he knows how to find the secret mine by this map. The directions are as follows: 'Start S. W., and go N. E., to main trail. Go N. W., to Crook; thence due west to blind canyon; N. W., over mountains; find valley; falls; search.' Now, blast my eyes, if that isn't a fine way to give a fellow information. I've found the valley and the falls, undoubtedly; the next thing, is to find the secret mine. He gives me the interesting advice to search for it. But where in the deuce is a fellow to search? In the earth, where all the other sanguine mortals are digging, or in the waters. Ha! a thought strikes me. The falls! What were they inscribed upon the map for, if not of use?"

Lighting a cigar, he continued to go over the map, carefully.

"In under where the falls of the map would seem to pour over the precipice, is a figure x!" he murmured, "very small, but yet discernible. I wonder if any importance is attached to that? By Jove! I believe I've at last stumbled upon the right clew. The secret mine is somewhere about these falls, and in that mine, men are working in golden rock, unbeknownst to the world at large. And I am the only living man who has the knowledge of this

mine, except those miners, whoever they are. I am the captain of a band of unknowns!"

"No! you err there. I am the captain in your stead!"

The words rung through the room in a strange, cool voice, and Rosebud Rob wheeled around, to find that he was not alone.

A man stood close by, with folded arms, and masked face—a man, about whose mustached mouth there hovered a peculiar smile.

It was Joaquin, Jr.!

Rosebud Rob gave vent to a prolonged whistle, as he saw him, and proceeded to make a critical survey of this man, whose presence was so gratuitously welcomed.

It was one of the Sport's traits of character never to be surprised at anything, but he could not help being curiously aroused at the coming of the masked stranger.

"Well!" he said, after a pause, "who are you?"

"Sorry I haven't a card!" the other replied, with a second smile. "My name, however, is Joaquin!"

"What! the famous bandit?"

"The son of the famous bandit—the toll-gate man!"

"Ah! yes. I have heard of you."

"Did you ever hear any good of me, sir Sport?"

"None to speak of. They say you gambled away your child!"

"Ha! Who says that?"

"Oh! I heard of it down at Hayward, the night the affair occurred."

"You were there, then?"

"I was."

"Then, maybe, you can tell me what became of my boy?"

"Sorry, but I don't know."

Something like a moan escaped the Spaniard's lips.

"Probably he is dead. I have never been able to learn a single tidings of him."

"Nor of your wife?"

"No! She has never been seen since she left me. You heard the story, then?"

"Yes, a dozen times. But to business, my dear sir. You say you are ahead of me, as captain of these men of the secret mine?"

"I am. I was a member of Nugget Ned's band, and after he had departed for the East, I told the bargain he had made with you to the boys, and was elected to the office of commander."

"Consequently, should I proceed to act further in this matter—"

"You would be silenced!"

Rosebud Rob whistled again.

Here was another of his air-castles smashed at the beginning.

"I am not surprised," he said, with a grimace to his tone. "Everything I take hold of in a speculative way literally burns my fingers. So it has been with this last case. And now, Mr. Joaquin, what is your business here with me?"

"My business is to get possession of that map and destroy it," the Spaniard cried, suddenly springing toward the table.

But the strong gripe of the Sport was at his throat, and he was hurled half-way across the room.

"If you will be so kind to remember the little Scriptural fact, the paper belongs to me," Rosebud Rob said, coolly. "When you get possession of it, it will be yours."

"Curse you!" Joaquin breathed, fiercely. "You would have me for an enemy instead of a friend, then?"

"Suit yourself, sir. Friends and enemies are two things I regard as they should be regarded—for instance: there is an individual stalking somewhere about this town as a living specimen of how I quit accounts with enemies."

"I think I have seen him, if you refer to the tough called Cross-eyed Mike," Joaquin said. "You refuse to give up the map?"

"Most assuredly I do."

"Then allow me to bid you good-evening. When we meet again it will be in a different manner, I trust."

About this same time, three men were seated in the room of Byron Cavendish, putting their heads together in the formation of villainous plans.

"The work must be done at once," Cavendish himself was saying, in a savage tone. "I've got to make my stake and clear out."

"Why so? You are not such a coward as to fear that Spaniard, Joaquin?" sneered Devere, contemptuously.

"It is not him alone that I fear, although his hatred is not to be despised," Cavendish replied. "It is this infernal Irishwoman, who has been following me around, wherever I have gone, for the last week. Curse her!"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Well, what are you laughing about? I don't see anything so funny about it, now."

"Well, why don't you marry her?"

"Marry the devil!"

"No! no! you are already joined to him. But, you see, marry this old lunatic, and make her serve our purposes. After you have done with her, Cross-Eyed Mike can easily tap her upon the head;" and the man from Guster City nodded toward the third man of the party, who, as he had intimated, was the bully, Cross-Eyed Mike.

The bully of bell-punch fame sat in one corner upon a stool, and was rather an amusing-looking specimen of humanity.

His head and face were nearly covered with stained bandages, which plastered his wounds, only leaving his eyes, mouth and chin exposed to view. Every

once in awhile he would give vent to a groan of pain and rage, while his huge bony hands would clench and unclench in a way that boded no good to the cause of all his suffering and mortification.

"Ef ye want any funerals tended to, ye kin bet hyar's w'at is in ther right speerit fer ther bizness!" the giant announced.

"You shall work directly, at good salary!" Devere replied. "And now, my lord, what do you say to marrying this old Irish vagrant, who styles herself Mrs. Bounce? Of course, it would only be done in the name, and after we've used her, it will be easy to put her out of the way."

"But in what way can we use her?" the baronet demanded, disgusted with the idea.

"Easy enough. She sits and talks much with the hermit. Get her to pump out the secret of the cache containing the treasure."

"Yes, yes; but will she do this?—and think of the trials I am to undergo!" gasped Cavendish.

"Fshaw! what of that?—Will the gold not repay you for that, and more? Come, don't be a fool. You are dead broke, and I'm depending on you for cash. It's your only hope of finding out about the treasure."

"And how about the old man and the girl?"

"I'll attend to that. The hermit's doom is as good as sealed, now. I have got on intimate terms with the cook, below, and she is in possession of a vial of liquid, one drop of which, placed in the old man's coffee, when I may see fit to direct, will insure his death within an hour."

"Devere, you are a villain."

"Not particularly so, my lord. I am serving you for money, else I should not plan thus. Half of that treasure, which the hermit has stored away, will amply compensate for a little work like this!"

"See heer, Cap! Jest hold yer hosses, a bit. Ye seem ter be countin' on half o' that auriferous?" Gasket grunted, suspiciously.

"Yes. Half is to be mine."

"Kareet. An' ther Englisher he ar' countin' on t'other half, I kalkylate, hain't he?"

"Certainly."

"Waal, I war thinkin' that same, an' I'm a sinner ef I don't fail ter see whar my half cums in. Two ha'ves make a hull, an' ye ken't squeeze another sheer in, nohow."

"Oh! as to that, we will pay you a fair sum, out of our individual shares, after your work is done."

"No ye won't. I kick!"

"What?"

"I kick, like a yearlin' steer. I bawk like a *doro*. I squeal!"

"What do you mean, you fool?"

"I illustrated plain enuff, didn't I? I ain't doin bezzess after ther same style, yeh bet. Oh! no-nary time! I has a third outen ther, or I don't work a muscle."

"Nonsense! are you crazy, man? We can get a dozen to do the work for a drink of tarantler."

The ruffian grinned, broadly, and winked his cross-eyes, knowingly.

"Stave ahead, ef ye want to. I've got inter yer plans, an' I'll expose 'em all, sure's I'm ther forty-graph o' a modern Patience on er monument. Here I go!" and he arose, as if to depart.

"Stop! Sit down!" both men cried, in alarm.

"You shall have a third, if you serve us faithfully. Now, for our plans."

"First, you are to get the Irish woman over!" said Devere. "All depends upon finding out where the treasure is hidden. I know a fellow up the gulch who once studied for a preacher, but got suspended from the pulpit for stealing an' overcoat. He know's all the crooks an' turns in the profession, and can splice you, so it won't be holding, in law."

"Are you sure?" Cavendish demanded, dubiously.

"Of course. The next thing, this meddling Sport must be put out of the way!"

"Not by me!" the giant growled, quickly. "I've had my fill o' thet sardine."

"Very well; I'll attend to that, then. The girl is left for you. She must be captured, and carried into the mountains. There's an old but over beyond the west range, that would be a capital prison to leave her in."

"Then, I'm ter nab her, an' skedaddle, at first chance, eh?" the giant asked, an evil glitter in his eyes.

"Yes; but, mind; you're to offer her no rudeness or insult."

"Bet yer pile I'll handle her like I would a baby!" was the reply, as the man rose to leave the room.

"I'll lay fer my job, ter oncet, and return."

After he had gone, Devere said:

"He'll do his part all right, never fear. After we get through with him, it all depends on our generosity whether he gets a third of gold, or a third of cold lead. Ha! ha! I think the latter would serve our plans, furthest."

"Hist!" Cavendish said, in a low tone. "There is a knock at the door."

"The deuce! Who can be coming here at this time of night?"

Loth listened. Again there came a soft rap, evidently that of some person who was timid.

"It's a woman's rap," Devere whispered. "Shall I let her in?"

"Yes; we will see what she wants. Perhaps it is the girl, Idyl."

"Never fear. She'd not come here, for she fights shy of us both."

Arising, he approached the door, partly opened it, and peered out into the dark hallway.

A muffled figure pushed forward past him into the room—the figure of a woman, evidently, enveloped in a long hooded cloak, with a thick veil tied down

over her face, which served the purpose of a mask to her identity.

"Excuse me, pray!" a low, musical voice exclaimed, "but I came here in the hope of finding a man whom I wish to see."

"Ah, lady! be seated!" Devere said, setting a chair forward for her to occupy. "Perhaps I or my companion may be able to fill out the bill."

"Is his name Cavendish?" the woman demanded, pointing toward his lordship, who started strangely, an apprehensive pallor coming upon his florid countenance.

"I have the honor of being Lord Byron Cavendish, my lady," he said, with a profound bow.

"Then you are the man I seek. I have come for my child!" and throwing aside her veil, Berenice Muriete stood erect, with resolute face and flashing eyes.

Cavendish hissed a curse through his teeth, but a warning glance from Devere caused him to check his anger.

"You, madame? Who are you, pray?"

"Why ask that question?" the mother cried, vehemently, "when you know full well that I am the wife of the reckless fool whom you robbed of his child at the gaming-table, in Hayward? I am Berenice, Joaquin's wife, and I have come for my little son—my Pet. Do you hear? I have come either to possess myself of him, or to take your worthless life. You are two to one, but I can murder you both. A frantic mother knows no barrier between herself and child!"

CHAPTER IX.

"TO-MORROW NIGHT AT MIDNIGHT"—THE MARRIAGE.

"FURIES take the woman!" Cavendish gasped. "She is mad!"

"No, she is perfectly sane," Devere replied, a sinister smile illuminating his face. "I'll vouch for that. It is her motherly eagerness to again get possession of her child which causes her agitation. I am almost positive we can strike a bargain. The child is alive yet, my lord, is it not?"

"It was, at last accounts," the English schemer replied, catching his coadjutor's eye.

"But was so securely hidden away that this woman could not find it, were she to search a lifetime?"

"Exactly."

"It is well. In order to obtain her child, she must work for us, you see—must be our slave, to serve us in whatever way we may choose."

"Sir!" Berenice gasped, stepping back a pace. "What vile plot would you instigate now? I'll never lift a finger to serve you!"

"Then, by heaven! I swear that your child shall die before another day is ended, madam!" Cavendish cried, triumphantly. "I never knew how I was going to turn the brat to account hardly, but I see clearly enough now. You shall work for us, or my own hands shall feed him to the mountain wolves!"

A deathly faintness seized Berenice, and she reeled back with a gasp and a low cry, as she heard the threat of the unprincipled villain. She sunk upon the chair, her eyes fixed upon the baronet, in a gaze that caused him to shift uneasily in his seat.

"You feed my child to the mountain wolves, you monster!" she breathed, as if she could not believe that she had heard him utter the words aright. "You feed my innocent babe to the ravenous wild beasts, if I refuse to do your bidding!"

"Precisely, madame. One, in this world in which we live, is forced to look out for his own ends at the expense of his next neighbor. I am sadly in need of a little help, such as you might be able to tender me. 'Tis nothing so terrible that you need shrink from doing it. Your love for your boy ought to be strong enough that you would fight through fire and blood to regain possession of him!"

"Go on!" she gasped, her hands clenching and bosom rising and falling heavily. "Go on—tell me what I would have to do to get back my child!"

"Certainly, madame. To begin with, let me assure you that we are an unprincipled, unscrupulous pair of knaves, even though it so happens that I am an English lord."

"This fact, however, need make no material difference as to our dealings with you. If you serve us faithfully you shall have your child back, rest assured. Now, the case we have in hand is this. There is an old man named Jason Abbey, who lives in the lower part of this building, that has accumulated an immense fortune, and secreted it where no one can find it. We want it, and it is to be your business to find out where it is cached. This you can easily do, and report to us."

"And you will give me back my boy, if I do this?" the wife of Joaquin demanded, her hands clasping and her eyes glittering wildly with anticipation.

"You will give me back my darling and let me go?"

"Find out for certain where the hidden cache is, and silence forever the old hermit—which job can be easily done—and you shall have your boy and fifty dollars. Do you accept?"

"Murder!" Berenice gasped; "foul murder! Oh! no, sir. God help me! I cannot do that—I cannot—I cannot do that!"

"Very well; that settles it!" Cavendish said, arising haughtily. "There is no use for further parley. Devere, show the woman the door!"

"Oh! sir—my child! my precious, darling boy!—you will not—oh! you will not harm him!"

"You heard me say what I would do, madam. Devere, put her out, I say!"

"Stop!" Berenice's voice rang out in a fiercely pitiful tone—"stop! I will do your will rather than that my innocent babe shall die. May God in heaven forgive me for this weakness, but I cannot help it—oh! I cannot help it!"

And the poor woman broke down, utterly, and sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

The two schemers gazed at her, a moment, in silence; then Devere advanced and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Pray do not give way to lamentations, dear lady. Your work is not so terrible, after all, when you consider the future prospect of reunion with your child."

She hurried him back, with a wild gasp, an awful glare in her black eyes.

"Do not touch me, you demon in the shape of man!" she cried, "do not lay a finger's weight upon me. You have pushed me as far as you can. I will do what you have said—no more. And, God help you, if I do not then get back my child, I will tear your heart out! I will rend you limb from limb!"

"Never fear; we shall do our share of the compact, if you (do yours!)" Byron Cavendish said, eagerly. "I will see that the child is ready for delivery, when your work is done!"

"It need take but little time for my work, then, and you can send at once for my child. I have but to do murder, for I already know where the gold of Old Elk the Hermit is secreted!"

"What!" the two men exclaimed, quickly, while they started toward her, with a greedy gleam in their eyes.

"Ay! I know where the gold is secreted!" Berenice cried, waving them back. "I accidentally found out, a few days since, your villainies!"

"Then you shall tell us where it is, now, or we will murder you!" Cavendish hissed, with devilish triumph, and he drew a revolver from his pocket, as he spoke.

"We are alone, and you are completely in our power. You shall tell us, now, and while we are in search of the treasure, you can finish up your job!"

"That is it, exactly!" Devere added. "Not a minute is to be lost. Give us the secret at once."

A crafty, triumphant smile flitted to the pale lips of Berenice Muriete, and transformed her, as it were, into an avenging Nemesis.

"Not one syllable of that secret shall leave my lips, now!" she said, solemnly. "I shall go on with my work. The old hermit shall die, and then I am the only living being that can point out the location of the secret cache."

"It will be my hour of triumph then. I will hold the secret, and you shall first deliver up my child, ere you are let into it. Ha! ha!"

"Stop! You shall never leave this room alive, woman, unless you disgorge now!" Devere cried, savagely. "It's either death to you, or gold to us."

"Kill me if you choose. I am strong now, where I was weak a few moments ago. With me perishes your only hope of getting that fortune, for well you know that Jason Abbey would never reveal the secret, even to save his own child."

The two schemers were staggered.

They knew that she was right—that it all remained with her, whether or not they were to get the golden gain for which they had plotted so thoroughly. Their exchange of glances seemed a signal between them that it was best for their plans to trust all to her.

"You will, then, as I understand it, kill the hermit, and upon the delivery of the boy, yield up the secret of the buried treasure?" Cavendish said.

"I will!"

"Very well. A woman's word should be sufficient. When will you strike?"

"To-morrow night, at the midnight hour; meet me in the gulch; I shall be ready then!"

So much she said, after which she turned and left the room, no attempt being made by the men to hinder.

A dark figure cautiously preceded her down the stairway, and out into the gulch, which was full of shadows, and might have screened a host of enemies.

With hasty steps Berenice hurried along, until, when she was some distance from any habitation, a heavy hand was laid upon her shoulder, and she was brought to a standstill.

Before her was the figure of a man, with flowing hair and masked face, attired as a ranger.

She could not scream; a deathly faintness seized her, and she reeled in her tracks, for the dark, terrible eyes that met hers were those of Joaquin Muriete!

"Sh!" he said, in a tone that she knew meant command. "Make no violent demonstrations. I mean you no harm; I merely want to speak with you."

"Well?" she gasped, shrinking out of his grasp, her tone cold, calm, deliberate. "I am listening."

"Oh, Berenice! do not speak to me in that way, for it tears open the wound in my heart afresh. My wife, I have been haunting your footsteps to ask you this once, in the favor of a true and just God, to come back to me as a wife. Do not say no. Leave off this search for your child—leave it to me to find and restore our darling to your arms. Oh! for the love of our Father, my wife, do not say no—do not say no!" and convulsed with emotion, the strong man dropped on his knees before her, and raised his eyes supplicatingly.

"Arise!" Berenice said, not one touch of pity in her tone—not one sign of relenting. "I will never live with you until our little son is found. I have sworn to this—I will keep my word. Go! Our paths in life diverge here!"

"Stay! I would speak one word ere we separate. This time, Berenice, I feel that it will be forever. Something is constantly whispering in my ears the sentence, 'make thy peace.' Oh, my wife! it is this which tells me that we are looking for the last time upon each other's faces—that never again shall we

speak together, until after death shall have joined us in the other world. Berenice, shall we part in anger? Oh, no! God forbid that such a thing should be! But touch my hand with yours, and say you forgive me—then I will let you go!"

The tones of the man were now too pitifully thrilling for the wife to withstand. She hesitated but a moment; then approaching him threw her arms about his neck, and covered his lips and forehead with burning kisses.

"Joaquin, my husband, I do forgive you, as I hope God may forgive us both!" she murmured. "Farewell—"

She did not finish the sentence, but staggered from his embrace, only to fall in a swoon at his feet.

"Poor Berenice!" he said, hoarsely, as he knelt by her side. "It was cruel in me to cause her this pain and emotion, but I could not give her up without her forgiveness. Oh! how I deserve her scorn and contempt! how I merit this desertion, as man never merited it before! God bless you, my darling! I must leave you now. I must not tarry, when other work calls me elsewhere."

He fixed her head so that she would lie easy; then bending, he imprinted a last clinging kiss upon the cold, irresponsible lips, after which he arose to his feet and strode away from the spot, a different man than he had been a short time before; for now his step was firm, his courage strong.

"It was a long while ere Berenice awoke from her swoon, but it was to almost instant comprehension of what had occurred and her surroundings."

"Joaquin has gone!" she moaned. "May God watch over him, for I, too, fear we shall never meet again!"

After the night, came the day.

The sun arose from behind the gigantic crags, and looked down as smiling into Cascade Gulch, as though nothing of villainy had ever entered there.

The air was fragrant and balmy; the dreamy Indian summer haze hung over the ridges; the sounds of nature droning, too, such soft sweet music as would almost lull a person into sleep.

About noon, Rosebud Rob, while sauntering southward, through the valley, came unexpectedly upon Idyl.

She was seated in under the shade of a large cottonwood tree, which grew upon the banks of the rushing stream, engaged in reading from a novel which she had borrowed of Sir Tom Somerset, some days previous.

She was half-reclining, with her head pillowed upon one hand and supported by her elbow, while her wavy silken hair blew about in confusion, as it was lifted by the gentle breeze.

She did not notice the Sport's arrival, until he had been gazing admiringly down upon her, for some moments.

Then, she flushed scarlet, and assumed a more dignified posture.

"Well! well!" Rosebud Rob exclaimed, in his laughing, easy way, "what is the meaning of this? Has the girl-miner really taken a holiday, all by herself, and laid the pan and shovel aside?"

"Yes, Mr. Mapleton. I am sure I ought to have a holiday once in a while."

"True enough. Not one young lady out of a possible hundred, average them the world over, would think they could labor as you do, and at the same time be as cheerful. So you prefer the quiet, and the companionship of a book, eh?"

"Yes, especially on such a day. Won't you join me in my solitary picnic, Mr. Mapleton? See! I have a lunch, and some reading."

"Nothing would please me better, Miss Idyl, but, you see, I've got wind of a little circus, down the gulch, here, and I've got to be present."

"A circus, sir?"

"Yes—that is, it will amount to about the same thing, in the end. There will be some pantomime, a little fun, and possibly some tumbling."

"I must confess that I don't understand you, sir."

"And I am sorry that I cannot give you any further information," the Sport replied, gayly. "Good-day! I wish you a happy time."

Then he was off, his quick elastic stride soon taking him out of sight, among the crowds of miners that filled the gulch.

In a cabin, some distance south of the hermitage, we will next meet the reader.

The place is newly-built, with the rude simplicity of the frontier, and is untenanted, save by two men, who stand facing each other, in one of the unfurnished rooms.

They were the two plotters, Devere and Lord Cavendish, and upon the face of the latter was a sullen, uneasy expression.

"I don't fancy this business in the least!" he growled, savagely. "The idea of my marrying that Irish vagrant is perfectly preposterous. Supposing wind of such a thing should get back to England, which is not unlikely, as my companion du voyage, Somerset, is in this very town? There'd be a high old rupture then in my social position—curse it!"

"Pshaw! I've told you a dozen times that it would be all right. And it is imperative that you should get her over on our side."

"And why imperative?"

"I will tell you. Several times I have discovered that woman listening at our door, which causes me to believe that she may have found out some of our plans. As her mania seems to be for getting married, once you get her under your wing as a wife you can easily manage it."

"Curse her! But there must be no mistake in this matter. I am not to be legally bound to her!"

"Of course not. Weslyn, who will be here presently, is no authorized preacher, so that though you may be wedded in the regular style, it will not be holding. They ought to be here now."

"Seems to me you are mighty anxious to get me into this scrape," his lordship asseverated.

"So I am, for all depends on getting that woman over. To-night, remember, our work begins."

At this juncture the door opened, and into the room bounded the eccentric Mrs. G. W. Bounce, with a screech of delight, followed by a smooth-faced gentleman, in black garb, who possessed a very clerical aspect.

"Och! me own honey! me darlint, ontirely!" Mrs. Bounce cried, as she espied Lord Cavendish, and rushed into his embrace, giving him a regular grizzly hug. "Och! me shamrock, I've come to yez, wid a heart overflowing wid swate love. Divil a bit do I care, now, fer that spalpeen who ran off wid me money, for it's meself that has found a jewel phat shines resplendant, bedad!"

"Hang it, woman, release me!" Cavendish growled, struggling to get away, but to no purpose, for Mrs. G. W. B. hung on pertinaciously. "Confound you, Devere, will you stand there and permit this—this accursed nonsense?"

"Nonsense d'ye call it?" roared Mrs. Bounce, her voice now pitched to a high key—"nonsense, is it? Och! no, me darlint, it's the privileges av a swate heart, ontirely, to hug her bowld laddy, so it is, so it is."

"Release him, Mrs. Bounce," said Devere. "The Reverend Mr. Weslyn has arrived, and will marry you to Lord Cavendish, after which he will take you to the hotel, where you will have a happy time, all by yourselves, with no one to interrupt you."

"Shure, an' how do yez do, Mr. Weslyn?" the bride-prospective cried, leaving Cavendish to bounce into the arms of the minister. "Och! wurra, an' be it yezself that is goin' to bind me darlint closely to my heart, forever?"

"I believe I am to officiate in that capacity, madam," Weslyn replied, shaking off Mrs. B., not too gently.

In the meantime, Devere had found chance to whisper to his lordship:

"Brace up, old boy! Don't be scared, but take all with the resignation of a saint. When the knot is tied, you can take your bride to the hotel, where I will join you later, for work."

Cavendish shuddered, and muttered a disgusted protest.

It was a positive torture to him.

"Are the parties both ready?" the Reverend Mr. Weslyn ventured to ask.

"Both ready," Devere replied. "Mr. Weslyn, I make you acquainted with Lord Byron Cavendish of England. This Hibernian lady is to be his bride."

"Arrah! an' it's true fer yez, whin ye say them same!" Mrs. G. W. B. cried, bounding forward, and thrusting her large bony hand into that of his lordship. "Marry us now, yer honer, and it's a swate and smack ye shell hev from the bride, bedad!"

It is to be inferred that the clerical Weslyn had no desires in this direction, any more than had Cavendish, whose hand was suffering untold pain in the grasp of the prospective bride.

Devere stood back at a safe distance, convulsed with repressed laughter.

The reverend gentleman now produced a book from under his arm, and in solemn tones began to read a marriage service.

Cavendish was quaking and trembling in every limb, while his bride stood squarely erect, with a stolid expression of countenance, which was complacency personified.

At last the ceremony was concluded, and Weslyn handed Mrs. Cavendish a certificate, which he had previously drawn up.

"Dear lady, that is a certificate of your marriage. Allow me to wish you both much joy!"

"Here, too!" cried Devere, advancing. "My lord, may the good spirits ever bless your union."

"And let me be next to offer my congratulations!" exclaimed another voice, cool and triumphant in its tone, and there stepped from the adjoining room the Sport of the mines, Rosebud Rob.

CHAPTER X.

LEGALLY BOUND—JOAQUIN'S BLOW—CAPTURED.

A FRIGHTFUL curse escaped Cavendish as his gaze fell upon the Sport.

"How came this devil here, Devere?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"That I am unable to tell you, my lord. I supposed the cabin untenanted."

"And got very much fooled, as a natural consequence!" Rosebud replied, with a chuckle. "Mrs. General George Washington Cavendish, allow me to offer my congratulations, and at the same time square up a debt. You know I promised you a hundred dollars, providing you succeeded in wedding this aristocratic British blackleg!" and with a bow, he laid a couple of fifty dollar gold pieces in her hands.

"Och! shure an' it's a moighty foin gintlemen yez be, Mr. Rosebud; but divil a candle can the likes of yez hold to my swate shamrock be me side!"

Cavendish wheeled upon Devere, with a gasp, his face as white as death.

"What—what does this mean, Devere? I have been fooled—tricked into a marriage with this woman—this Irish vagrant!"

"Och! wurra! wurra! d'ye mind what he says!" Mrs. G. W. B. Cavendish cried, indignantly, and clinging firmly to her new spouse, she gave him a couple of severe cuffs in the region of his ears.

"D'ye mind how the spalpeen calls his bride an Irish vagrant, now? Och! bad luck to yez, old man! It's meself that will have to break yez in to tha double

harness, tha same as poor Mike Maloney used to break in the mules. Arrah! me darlint, it's many's tha time that I'll black the eyes of you, an' pull out the Galway sluggins that grow forinist the face of yez. No! yez don't, bedad!" as Cavendish struggled frantically to get free. "It's Mrs. General George Washington Cavendish as is good at hangin' on, an' by the same ghost av Patrick McHenry, I'll niver part wid yez, me swate darlint, from mornin' 'til night." And, as if to enforce her words, the new bride forcibly threw her arms about his lordship's neck, and nearly smothered him with kisses.

"Help! Take this she-cat off, somebody!" he roared, lustily. "Kill her—do anything to rid me of her. Devere, curse you, you are the cause of all this trouble!"

"Hold up, British!" Rosebud Rob cried, at this juncture; "don't lay it all on your partner-in-crime, but give me credit for a lion's share. Devere had arranged that you should be wedded by an illegal minister, but I willed otherwise!"

"What? what?" Cavendish almost yelled—"and this man—"

"Is the Reverend Calkins Smithson, a regularly ordained minister of the gospel!" the Sport replied, triumphantly, "and, consequently, you are legally wedded to Mrs. Bounce—now Mrs. Lord Cavendish. Ha! ha! ha!"

The Englishman uttered a nondescript sound, between a gasp and a groan, and would have fallen, had not the stout arms of Lady Cavendish supported him.

"This is a damnable plot to ruin me!" he articulated, hoarsely.

"It's an imposition—a cheat!" interposed Devere.

"I see, now, that this man is not Weslyn, although the resemblance would deceive almost any person."

"I am the Reverend Calkins Smithson!" the recent knot-tyer said, removing his hat. "Learning through the so-called Sport, of this villainy about to be practiced upon an unsuspecting woman, I readily consented to counterplot, and make the union a union in law and fact. As I am an ordained and licensed minister of the gospel, the marriage between Lord Byron Cavendish and the Irish lady is perfectly legal, and binding."

"Arrah, me darlint! me shamrock!" Lady C. said, giving her spouse another desperate hug. "It's meself that will stick by yez till tha day of doom!"

"Lord Cavendish," said Rosebud Rob, calmly, "you may as well make the best of a bad job, and take your bride to the hotel. This is no place to detain a newly-married woman, whose romantic heart craves to be alone with you, that she may manifest more of her unselfish affection. I tender you my congratulations, wish you much joy, and go on in advance of you. Smithson, will you join me?"

And, with bows, the two men left the cabin, and from the door Devere watched them saunter away.

He then turned back toward Cavendish, who stood pale and irresolute.

"It has been a bad ending," he said, "but all the same, I am sure we have got Mrs. C. enlisted in our interests. Take her to the hotel and explain our plans, my lord, and I'll guarantee she'll serve us a good turn yet."

And then he, too, took his departure, and nothing was left but for the Englishman to do as advised, though it cut his pride as it had never been stabbed before.

Many were the curious and amused glances that were leveled at him as he went through the valley with the new Lady Cavendish clinging to his arm, while behind her trailed the enormous train of her huge-figured calico dress.

And though his lordship tried his best to avoid meeting any more of the miners than possible, he was horror-struck to find a swarm of them gathered about the door of Mrs. Matrevis's establishment, among whom he recognized Rosebud Rob, Idyl, and Sir Tom Somerset, in conspicuous positions.

A spark of mischief entered the Sport's eyes as he saw them approaching, and fixing his gaze triumphantly upon the Englishman, he cried:

"Hyar they cum, pilgrims—the new Lord an' Lady Cavendish. What d'ye say, now? Git ready—three cheers for the bride!"

And three loud, long yells were given, such as had never before echoed through that valley, and they caused Cavendish's face to redden like a turkey's comb, while Mrs. C. rather seemed to enjoy it.

"Good fer yez, me b'yees!" she cried, in her sharp, rasping tone. "Bad luck to yez, too, fer ye can't hev the refusal av meself now, at all! It's the true darlint of a real lord that I am now ontirely, bedad!"

Another yell, then the ill-assorted couple had vanished within the hotel.

"There! what do you think about it, now? Do you envy Mrs. C. her choice?" Rosebud Rob cried, turning to Idyl.

"Oh! no! indeed! I rather think she has got the worst of the bargain."

"Don't fool yourself, there. She will make his lordship toe the mark, every time. Somerset, I would speak with you."

And the two young men sauntered away. When they were out of ear-shot, the Sport stopped short, and faced the young baronet with a keen gaze.

"I have come here to ask you a few questions!" he said, in his brisk way. "I want to know how you are getting along with our pretty girl-miner?"

Somerset smiled, faintly.

"A very good way to hit me a stab, that!" he replied, "when you are doubtless aware that I am not getting along at all."

"Don't misconstrue my motives," Rosebud Rob replied, soberly. "I do not wish to oppose your suit, but propose to further it, having come to the con-

clusion that you are a square sort of pilgrim, and just the fellow to chaperone the girl through life."

"But is it not impossible for me to win her, when she is plainly fascinated with you?"

"Pshaw! no. You see, I've a peculiar tact for managing these women, who are eternally and forever falling in love with me. If my flashy appearance is the captor of so many feminine hearts, it is but natural that I, a man to suit all circumstances, should have a remedy for the evil. Now, then, I believe, that, if Miss Idyl could be disgusted with me, she would turn to you, and you could win her. Therefore, here is a letter, for the purpose. You note that it is directed in a feminine hand, and that it comes from Deadwood. Well, inside, is a cleverly executed forgery, purporting to come from an affectionate wife of mine, who speaks of our family, and asks me to come back to her children and herself, at once, etc., etc. Now, supposing Miss Idyl were to pick this up, and read it—do you believe she would want anything more to do with that sportive individual they call Rosebud Rob?"

"But this would be a cruel deception, if the girl really cares for you!"

"Humph! all's fair in love or war. I regard Miss Idyl as an estimable young lady, but as I've no notion of incumbering myself with feminine responsibilities, for some time to come, why, I say to you—sail in and win!"

"And you really propose this scheme in my behalf?" Sir Tom cried, thrusting out his hand, warmly.

"I do, believing you will take good care of Idyl, if you get her."

"Rest assured on that. And I feel almost sure that I can win her now."

"Well, I wish you success. There goes Miss Idyl out toward her claim, now. I will cut across, and drop the letter as I pass along, where she will be sure to find it."

And giving Sir Tom's hand a grip of assurance, the Sport was off across the gulch, whistling merrily, while Sir Tom sauntered back toward the hotel.

Rosebud Rob was as good as his word.

He passed through Idyl's claim in advance of her, and dropped the letter, after which he hurried on toward a grocery store, which he entered, and as a pretext, purchased a few matches.

Idyl came to her claim, and was about to gather up her mining implements for the night, when she espied the envelope, and picked it up, curiously.

"Rosebud Rob," she muttered, as she gazed at the writing, "and in a lady's hand, too! He must have dropped it when he passed. I will keep it and give it to him to-night."

She gathered up her "tools," and locked them in a plank shanty close at hand, and then wandered off toward the cottonwood tree on the bank of the stream. Here she seated herself upon the grass, and taking the envelope from her pocket, gazed at the directions a few moments, thoughtfully.

"I wonder what lady corresponds with him?" she murmured, turning the envelope over and over.

"Would it be any harm for me to read this?" Curiosity and sight are the ministers of temptation; the more you see, the greater the curiosity to see more, and it amounts in the end to a capitulation of reason and conscience.

Anyhow, the first she knew, Idyl had the letter spread out upon her lap, and an expression of wonder and surprise crept upon her face as she perused it. It had been written some months before, and ran as follows:

"DEAREST HUSBAND:

"I write to let you know that I am well, and hope you are the same. Jimmy, our youngest, has just recovered from a severe attack of the measles; but Harry, Bobby, Dicky, Sammy and Thomas Jefferson, our other cherubs, are well and hearty. Dear husband, I long for you to return home, and—"

Idyl did not read any further.

She was quite satisfied with the revelation which had dawned upon her.

"Mr. Mapleton is married," she said, her face suddenly growing pale, "and he never told me of it! I am now so glad that nothing but words of friendship ever passed between us, for, certainly, no good could have come of it."

A short while afterward Rosebud Rob entered the saloon of Mrs. Matrevis's establishment, and searching about soon singled out Baltimore Bees, who was sitting in one corner, quite alone.

She nodded as he approached, in her cool, nonchalant way.

"Well, they say there's bin a weddin hyerabouts," she observed.

"Yes; I have succeeded in marrying the Hibernian off to the Britisher. But, now, I have other business. Bees, old girl, how much are you good for?"

A peculiar smile flitted upon the dare-devil girl's face.

"I'm ginerally gauged as bein' death fer sumwhar 'twixt twelve an' twenty toughs or a brace o' cinnamons, when et cum's ter squar' work," she replied, with a smile. "Leastwise, thar's them as sez I'm purty nigh boss on shootin'."

"Which is all the better for my purpose. As soon as it comes dark, I want you to meet me over on the western side of the creek, prepared for an excursion into the wilderness, if necessary. Will you come?"

"Well, now, I shouldn't wonder if I mought, ef thar's goin' to be any fun afloat."

"Never fear. There'll be plenty of it, without doubt."

Then they separated.

Just at dusk the usual evening stage came lumbering into the town, but it fetched not its customary

load of passengers, nor were there the usual smiles upon the face of Jake Johnson, the veteran Jehu. One of his horses was limping badly, and the coach had evidently been used for a target for rifle-practice, as it was full of holes and cracks.

And when Jake threw down the lines and leaped from his seat, he swore a good-sized oath that he never would drive "the shebang" again.

A curious crowd gathered at once, and after being duly urged, Jake finally consented to give his late experience, which must have been pretty hard, judging from appearances.

"Ye see how et war," he began, blowing his nose vigorously, "I war fetchin' in a mighty big load o' speculators from Deadwood, an' most o' 'em war purty well heeled, at that. An' w'en we got along at Joaquin's place, ther road war blocked w' a passel o' masked galoots, who war armed an' ready fer fight. When I fetched up ther stage ter a stand-still as I generally do at thet p'int o' ther cumpuss, Joaquin hisself, he steps forth, and demands toll—a hundred dollars fer each an' every galoot, myself excepted. Did they kick? Wal, now, you kin jest bet they did, that same! Wouldn't pay it, said every man, an' Joaquin sed they'd haff to turn back an' go by some other route ter Cascade City, ef they didn't slap down the cash. Then thar war an' attempt ter argy, when thet Joaquin, he wouldn't argy wuth a continental copper.

"Well, ther long an' short o' et war, b'yees, that a pilgrim finally pulled a 'barker', an' let drive at Joaquin hisself, an' then ther music begun. Them road-agents they jest opened upon thet coach w' their repeatin' rifles, in a way 't would make yer hair stand upon eend. They jest riddled thet old shell, an' ef I didn't leap clean frum ther stage seat, below, to ther bottom o' a precipice, ye ken call me a liar. Arter aw'ile, I heerd a cessation, in ther shuttin', an' creepin' ter ther road, around ther bend, I found the stage and hosses, an' kin om. An' may I be teetotally cussed fer er turkey buzzard, ef I ever drive that stage ag'in!"

"Was the man Joaquin killed?" asked one of the crowd.

"Nary a time. Ther bullet nevyer made him wince, though I ked swar et struck him over ther heart."

"But what do you suppose became of the passengers?"

"Reckon some o' 'em war salted away inter eternity, an' mebbe some escaped or war captured!"

A strong crowd had gathered by this time, and a proposal made to the effect that a band should be organized to hunt the road pests out of their den, was greeted with tumultuous applause. Accordingly some three score of volunteers were chosen, and after arming themselves, set out on foot for the toll-gate through the shadows of the falling night.

They were headed by a fellow by the name of Bal-lantyne.

A brave man he was, who was never known to shirk at the approach of danger, and consequently his followers felt less apprehension in going to battle with one of Joaquin's type, backed as he was by as reckless a set of men as ever roamed the mountains.

On arriving at the spot where the toll-gate had stood, they found it a smoldering bed of coals, as well as the building which had stood in the rear of it.

And nowhere were to be seen the Junior Joaquin and his masked followers.

They had disappeared in the night, but whither they had gone was a mystery. No tracks were discovered leaving the place; the road-agents and their leader had literally stepped out of sight, as if the world had opened up and swallowed them.

A few dead bodies were found close by, and upon each of them were pinned a paper, containing these words:

"This is not the end! A good beginning will make a bad ending—for the enemies of

"JOAQUIN, JR."

While these citizens of Cascade City were looking after the man Joaquin, there were shadows hovering about their own valley, which boded evil to certain ones.

One of these shadows turned out to be the giant, Cross-Eyed Mike Gasket.

The ruffian was skulking about with uncommon stealth, for a man of his size, and that he was all ready for some piece of villainy was evident, for he was fully armed, and a horse lay crouching in the valley, but a few yards away, just out of the main trail.

As he stood in the dense pall of gloom, and gazed about him, he listened with greedy zest for some sound for which he was waiting.

In either direction, surrounding him, the lights from the various tents and shanties streamed out with brilliancy, but could not touch him, as he was sheltered by the mantle of night.

"Ther gal went up ter ther grocery store!" the giant muttered, peering expectantly to the south; "an' I reckon she must be comin' back now, purty quick."

"Ho! ho! won't she be surprised to find me hayr, waitin' fer her?—me, ther great illustrious patentee of ther celebrated bell-punch! Guess she'll be purty nigh awed inter silence, w'en she gazes at me."

And he chuckled, in anticipation of the affright-poor Idyl must experience when she should find herself in his clutches.

With great patience he waited. He knew that she must pass in that direction, on her return, and he meant to capture her as she came along.

And he was not disappointed! Soon his sharp sense of hearing caught the sound

of approaching footsteps, and drawing a large blanket from his shoulders, he crouched and waited.

Nearer and nearer came the unsuspecting victim—then, she saw a shadow dart in front of her, but ere she could utter a cry of alarm, a heavy blanket was thrown over her shoulders, and she was caught up, bodily, in a strong pair of arms.

She struggled, violently, but all to no avail. She was in a clasp of iron, and being borne swiftly away—at first on foot, but now on a horse!

CHAPTER XI.

THE MOON-TIDE—HUNTING THE HERMIT.

A MAN had been following not far behind Idyl, at the time of her capture, and hearing the struggle, rushed forward, but just in time to hear the night prowler dashing away on horseback.

"I wonder what was the matter?" he muttered, pausing to listen. The horseman was dashing westward across the valley. "Could it have been that fellow, Joaquin? I almost wish I'd given him that map, for it isn't a pleasant thing to have an enemy after his particular pattern."

And Rosebud Rob—for it was he, hurried on, little thinking that the retreating horseman was carrying away the girl-miner.

But, he was speedily aroused from his thoughts of Joaquin, by coming in heavy collision with some individual, who was hurrying through the darkness in a direction opposite to that in which he was going.

As a natural consequence, both men were down, in a style not the most graceful.

"Confound your clumsy carcass!" the Sport ejaculated, arising to a sitting posture, "what do you mean by telescoping a fellow in that way, without warning?"

"Ha! I recognize your voice. You are Rosebud Rob!" the other exclaimed, eagerly. "Is it not so?"

"I reckon ye might know by the perfume that exhales from my buttonhole bouquet," the Sport replied. "Who are you?"

"Tom Somerset. I have been searching for you. Where is Idyl?"

"I don't know. Why? Is she not at the Hermitage?"

"No. She started for the grocery some time ago, and becoming alarmed at her absence, I have come in search of her."

Rosebud Rob gave vent to a prolonged whistle, indicative more of comprehension than surprise.

"Are you sure she didn't pass you as you came?" he asked.

"Perfectly sure. I kept watch on either hand, and paused to listen every few steps."

"Then she's a goner, sure. I saw a female come out of the grocery and come down this way, but it didn't occur to me about its being Idyl. A few minutes ago I heard sounds as if a struggle were taking place, and got here just in time to hear a horseman dashing away. So betwixt me and you, I reckon the Angel o' the Gulch has been kerried off!"

Sir Tom groaned aloud.

"By whom? What shall we do?" he asked, excitedly.

"The best thing for you to do," the Sport observed, showing his hands thoughtfully down into his breeches pockets—"the best thing for you to do, is—well, let me see!—to sail in and rescue her. There's a noble scope of territory now, for you to embrace and prove that you're really worthy of the little gal. What a grand chance offers for you to fly like a knight of chivalry to her rescue, and become a heroic Apollo in her eyes. If I were a candidate for the matrimonial office, I'd lose no time in hastening on the trail of mine foes that I might smite them! Oh, no! you bet!"

"But—but look at the difficulties that must be overcome, the dangers that must be met, if a fellow were to attempt pursuit," Sir Tom said, wincing, and inwardly wishing he possessed half the coolness of the Sport.

"All I've got to say is—overcome and meet them, sir. If you don't you'll never win the girl-miner, and you'll never become a man to suit all circumstances, like myself. Ha! ha! ha!"

And then, the Sport walked away, leaving Sir Tom to reflect upon the advice he had just received.

The young baronet was not wanting for pluck, and it did not take him many minutes to decide that he should accept the tendered advice.

"I'll get me a horse, and go after Miss Idyl," he said. "That Rosebud chap has an idea that I am not of any great account, and I'll endeavor to change his mind."

And without delay he started through the gulch, toward a stable where he kept his own trusty horse.

In the meantime, Rosebud Rob, in going in an opposite direction, met with an adventure, which was at the same time unexpected and uninteresting to him, inasmuch as he had work which demanded his immediate attention.

He was suddenly pounced upon by a couple of men who sprung out of the cover of the night, and before he could defend himself, was borne to the ground, and securely bound. Under ordinary circumstances, two men would have been severely taxed to accomplish this feat with the Sport as a victim; but, it being a complete surprise, they had it all their own way.

Not only did they bind him, but they bandaged his mouth so that he could not speak. Then, seizing him they dragged him aside several rods, from the main trail, where they paused.

Devere then removed the bandage, but pressed a pistol muzzle significantly to the prisoner's temple, to enjoin silence.

"So we've got you, eh?" he said, grimly. "I thought we would. Surprise generally catches the best fish."

"Yes, so it seems. Five to one you couldn't have taken me, fairly!" Rosebud Rob replied. "Perhaps you will be so kind as to nominate your objective point in taking me thus a prisoner."

"Guess it wouldn't be no hard job to tell you that," Devere answered. "My pardner, here, Lord Cavendish and I, have come to the conclusion that you know entirely too much—ar' much too clever for our liking, and we have concluded to drown you in the creek, here, and rid the mines of at least one nuisance. Ain't that so, my lord?"

"That's it, precisely!" Cavendish responded, savagely. "We'll see if you'll come any of your jokes after you are made food for the fishes. I wager you won't!"

"Don't wager on uncertainties, my lord!" the Sport warned, with a laugh. "I am inclined to the opinion that I should enjoy the joke, should one of the fish attempt to swallow me. By the way, how do you like married life, my dear Britisher?"

Cavendish, with an oath, turned to Devere, who was in an attitude of listening.

"Come! let's tumble this fellow into the creek!"

"Stop!" Devere commanded, raising his hand to enjoin silence. "Listen! do you hear that roar?"

They all listened, and all heard it very plainly. It was like a great volume of water pouring over rocks with terrific din, while, at the same time, a sharp wind was blowing through the valley.

"What is it?" Cavendish demanded, in excitement.

"It is the coming of the so-styled moon-tide * of water, which rushes through this valley every time the moon falls. It is said to be behind time this month, but is coming now without doubt. Come! we must get to higher land. Leave the Sport here. The water will do the work for him, I'll warrant!"

And turning, the two villains fled hastily from the spot.

The moon-tide was upon the citizens of Cascade City, without scarcely any notice.

The heavens had clouded over all at once, and the wind had quickened to a strong gale, through the little valley. Then had come the ominous humming roar, and the cascade at the north end of the gulch began to assume the proportions of a Niagara, as great walls of water poured down the dizzy heights.

Like mighty breakers, the water seemed to roll over the precipice in tenfold greater volumes than usual, and plunge into the basin below with a din that was next to deafening.

The water, of course, could not be crowded into the narrow limits of the stream, and, consequently, began to overflow the valley bottom with alarming rapidity and increase of depth.

People ran screaming toward the higher land, in terror; horses and oxen were heard neighing and bellowing in affright, and a perfect pandemonium seemed afoot.

But it was only for the space of a few moments.

Then the strange tide had ceased to the ordinary flow of water. And in five minutes, aside from the rushing creek, only little pools of water stood in the valley to tell of the remarkable flood that had been.

The citizens came straggling back from their refuge upon the bluffs, and the subject of the flow was discussed with wonder by every one.

And a curious fact connected with it, was that the entire bottom of the valley was coated with fresh sand, to the depth of several inches.

What would be the result?

Would these sands yield gold, as those had done upon the claim of Idyl Abbey?

If so, the future success of Cascade City as a mining center, was already an established fact.

It only now required a thorough investigation, by daylight, to learn the truth.

All night long the valley was crowded by the excited populace, but strange to say, the particular vicinity of the Hermitage and Mrs. Matrevis's establishment, was quite deserted, which was not in accordance with the usual state of matters.

About midnight, three persons stood in a dark shadow which lay behind and around the old hermit's cabin. They were each armed, and stood in perfect silence like phantoms of the night.

"All is quiet and propitious for our work!" Lord Cavendish said, in a low voice. "The moon is coming out of the clouds, and will light our paths when we get among the mountains—for it is there that I believe the old man's treasure to be hidden."

"He must be in his bed, long ere this," Devere observed, glancing uneasily about him.

"Yes. The cabin is silent. See, the door is even left open, so that the girl, Idyl, can get in. Ha! ha! ere this, she is far away from here!"

"Where can the woman be delaying all this time?" Devere growled, his impatience becoming manifest. "It is a quarter past twelve."

"Oh! there's no hurry," his lordship responded. "The woman will not miss the redemption of her child, by staying away."

"Where is the brat?"

"Safely hidden—in the mountain-hut, where Cross-eyed Mike has been taking the girl-miner."

"Who is caring for him?"

"An old squaw whom I hired for the purpose."

Silence now reigned among the three night-hawks, Cavendish, Devere, and the Irish woman, whom the baronet had married.

Evidently she had received instructions, for she had nothing to say whatever, but kept close at the side of his lordship, as if she were afraid he might attempt to run away.

The silence about the cabin seemed equal to that

* This moon-tide, until lately, has been a great mystery in the Black Hills country. Its causes I will explain in a future story.—AUTHOR.

among the hawks. Far down the gulch torches could be seen flashing, and voices occasionally burst into loud, long shouts.

Suddenly a figure glided near to where the trio were standing.

"Sh!" a voice exclaimed, and the cloaked form of a woman was discernible, although the face was veiled. "Sh! don't speak aloud. Have you my child here?"

"The boy is where I can produce him within a few minutes," Byron Cavendish said, in hushed tones. "Go ahead, and do your part of the work first."

"I am prepared to, so do not fear. Is the old man in his bed?"

"We suppose that he is—at least, we have seen nothing of him since we have been in this vicinity."

"Who is this?" Joaquin's wife demanded, suspiciously, pointing to the new Lady Cavendish.

"A trusty person, whom I shall take along with us," the Englishman replied.

"Och! it's his wife I is, ontirely," the late Mrs. G. W. B. thought proper to announce, with due importance.

"You had better have left women out of the case!" Berenice said, impatiently.

"What are you but a woman?" Devere demanded.

"I don't aspire to that title, now that I am about to dye my hands in human blood!" was the bitter reply. "But I must not hesitate longer. Have your horses handy, as soon as I come back from my deadly mission."

She turned then and glided away, as silently as she had come.

The two villains peered after her through the faint moonlight, and saw her enter the cabin of the hermit through the open door.

"That means good-by to the old cuss!" Devere muttered. "His berth for a trip over Jordan is about as good as spoken for."

With eager impatience they waited. Every minute was now fraught with interest to them.

Soon Berenice Muriete came gliding back into their presence.

"Ha! you have done the work!" Cavendish hissed, bending forward eagerly.

"No, thank God! he was not there. He is not in the cabin."

"What? Ten thousand devils! Has the old wretch escaped us?"

"So it would seem. They say that he has been gone since before dark."

"Who says this?"

"Those in the saloon."

Both Devere and Cavendish joined together in uttering a broad curse.

"We are thus foiled in the outset," the former growled. "The old devil has learned of our plans, and gone to secure his gold!"

"And you are a traitor!" Cavendish raved, turning upon Berenice Muriete. "You are the snake-in-the-grass that has betrayed our confidence."

"Confidence? ha! ha! What confidence have you intrusted in me? You lie, when you call me a traitor! What object could I have? Am I not working to regain possession of my child? Go bring your horses, and we will start at once for the secret cache. But, first, bring me my child."

"That is impossible; the child is far from here. But guide us to that secret cache, and as there is a God in heaven, I will show you where to find the boy!" Byron Cavendish cried, excitedly.

"Very well," Joaquin's wife said. "We shall see how you will keep your word this time."

Devere now left them, but soon returned with four fast horses, which he had provided, and in ten minutes more the whole party were mounted and dashing away.

Berenice Muriete led, and Cavendish, Devere, and the recent bride followed in her wake. At a gallop they crossed the valley, fording the swift creek, and finally ascending among the mountainous foothills beyond.

The moon had by this time fully emerged from the clouds, and was casting a dim, whitish radiance over all objects. Everything bore a spectral semblance; even the four equestrians of the night seemed like phantoms as they toiled up through the rocky way, led by a trail that was extremely difficult and, in many places, dangerous.

But the wife of Joaquin apparently knew it by heart, for she kept far ahead of the rest, and dashed on fearlessly.

The followers fared worse.

Cavendish was twice thrown out of the saddle, being a clumsy horseman, while Devere's animal became suddenly lame, and limped horribly.

For what seemed hours of time to the rear trio, Berenice Muriete led on—on, through a wilderness of rocks; now over rugged bluffs, along the edges of frightful precipices; then suddenly down sheer descents into black depths, where it was impossible to see a hand before one's face.

Would they never come to the end of this wild journey?

"How long, for heaven's sake, must we continue in this way?" Devere at last demanded, as Berenice slackened up to allow their approach. "I'm getting sick of it."

"Arrah! an' it's meself as has got ontirely the same," the Irishwoman added. "Bad luck to me, I believe it's Mrs. Bounce I'd rayther 'av' remained, than to be skurried off into that devil's own ratratre, bedad."

"Shut up, woman!" Cavendish enjoined. "What difference does it make to an old wretch like you, where you are?"

"Och! do yez hear that? Och! to the ould dogs wid yez, ye murtherin' spalpeen! It's meself as will git off me horse, an' do no less than sp'ile yer

beauty fer yez. Oh! bad luck to yez! ye needn't grin. That was nary a gal at Donnybrook Fair as could handle a stick aqual to the wife av Mike Maloney, shure; an' menny's the sore head have the same young bucks received for not civilly tr'atin' the hod-carrier's darlint!"

"Here! no more quarrelling!" commanded Berenice, drawing rein, decisively. "I'll shoot the one that persists."

"Bad luck to yez! what business is it of yours, at all?" the irate Lady Cavendish began, but the gleam of a revolver from under the woman leader's cloak, caused her suddenly to become mum.

"We have no great distance to go yet before we come into the vicinity of the buried treasure!" Berenice said. "So keep quiet, or our mission here may be fruitless."

She then dashed on again, and the others followed as best they could.

They now rose gradually up out of a black mountain chasm, by a narrow, tortuous way, through beetling cliffs. The further they went the more rugged and almost impassable grew the route. Briers and undergrowth choked the way, and tore and scratched both the riders and the animals.

Devere growled constantly.

"I'd choose a life of poverty, ere I'd come out on such a jaunt again," he said, with a fierce imprecation.

At this juncture Berenice gave a little exclamation, and drew rein abruptly.

"What is it?" Cavendish demanded, riding eagerly forward. "Curse me if it isn't a horse tied beside the trail."

"Yes, a horse," Berenice said—"probably the one ridden by the old hermit, to his cache!"

"Curse the man. I thought he was totally disabled by rheumatism."

"But it seems that he can ride. Come! we must dismount, too, and creep after him. I daresay he has not been many hours gone, and he shall not cheat me out of my child!"

"Ha! ha!" Cavendish chuckled. "How one of these motherly women will toil for their first-born, Devere! There's something really strange about it!"

"Divil a bit strange at all, at all!" volunteered Mrs. C. "Shure, an' it was four childrens we had in the little cot formin' that ould sod, an' ivery one av 'em was healthy as a pig in the sty, until tha war all seized wid der bloody ould faver, bedad, an' wafted on high. Och! niver fear, me jewel; it's some o' tha same foin' days ye'll be toddling about a leetle descendant o' tha Maloneys!"

"You'll be in your grave, ere that, never fear!" Cavendish growled.

They all dismounted, now, and after securing their animals, crept cautiously on over the rugged trail, Berenice in the lead.

On—then, they all paused in front of a black opening in the rocks.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GIANT'S FATE.

WE must return, now, and follow the ruffian, Cross-eyed Mike, who, with poor, terrified Idyl clasped in his arms, a helpless prisoner, was riding with might and main, out of the valley of the cascade, toward the west.

He, however, did not take the trail which was later selected by Joaquin's wife, but struck into a narrow gap or fissure among the crags, further to the south. This entrance was not known to very many, for it was guarded by a chaparral of trees.

Once into the fissure, it gradually developed into a narrow, dark, almost subterranean ravine, which ran for a long distance, seemingly through the bowels of the mountains, ere it began to ascend.

The giant rode through this, carefully, for it was blockaded in many places by fallen rocks, and logs from the dizzy heights above. It was intensely dark, and he made but slow progress, until he finally reached a sort of table-land, from which the country stretched off toward the Inyan Kara range, in a more broken confusion of rocky and wooded dead-falls.

As soon as he had made the table-land, the giant dismounted, and laid Idyl upon the ground.

He had for some time past, been aware that she was unconscious, by the dead weight with which she had rested upon his arm, and he now saw an opportunity to bind her, in order to carry her with more safety.

This he at once proceeded to do, and after he had accomplished the task, he dashed a little water into her face, from a pool, close at hand.

Presently she shuddered, convulsively, and opened her eyes.

A look of utter horror came into her eyes, as she beheld the man monster, dimly revealed in the moonlight, as he bent over her, with a hideous leer.

"So I've got ye, my daisy," he said, with a triumphant chuckle—"got ye as nicely in my power as any rice. As ye've heard me say, several times, me, Mike Gasket, o' bell-punch fame, it aint ther fate o' ther feminine gender."

"Why have you brought me out into this wilderness?" Idyl demanded, her heart filled with terror for her safety, for she had seen enough of this giant to feel certain that he was not too good to commit any crime. "Tell me, was it not Byron Cavendish, who hired you to do this work?"

"Wal, now, I jest reckon ye aint fur off ther groove, my gal. It war jest about thet same galoot as persuaded me ter fetch ye away from ther diggin's, you bet."

"I thought so. I have felt that that villain was plotting evil against me, although I did not expect this. What are you going to do with me?"

"Ho! ho! that's easy enuff answered!" the ruffian growled. "Thar's a snug leetle hut on ahead hyar,

whar I'm goin' ter leave ye in keer uv an old Injun squaw, w'ile I sot fer Cascade City, ter j'line Lord Cavendish in s'arch fer ther old hermit's gold, o' w'ich I'm a-goin' ter git a sheer, you bet yer boots!"

"What! are these men conniving to rob my poor father of his savings?" Idyl cried, in an agony of alarm and excitement.

"Thet's jest ther ticket they're votin', an' so am I, me lady. I guess as how thar'll be no use fer us ter stay hyar longer, so we'll pull on toward the hut. It can't be fur away now."

And picking Idyl up in his arms, as if she were no heavier than a baby, the giant clambered into his saddle, and urged his horse off into a rapid gallop.

Struggle as she would, the prisoner could gain nothing, for she was now securely bound in addition to being clasped in the ruffian's arms.

Finally a hut of logs loomed up along the trail; seeing which the giant said, with a coarse laugh:

"Hyar we aint fer yer prison now, an' I'll leave ye ter ther tender mercies of an old hag, until my return. Then you shall become Mrs. Cavendish. Ho! ho! hyar we aint; and he drew rein in front of the hut, or Indian lodge, which was built of a variety of materials, such as adobes, saplings and skins.

There was a single doorway, and in this stood a slovenly-clad Indian woman, who had been watching their approach with evident curiosity.

As Cross-Eyed Mike dismounted, with Idyl in his arms, she managed to position herself so as to fill up the best share of the aperture.

"Ugh! What pale-face want?" she demanded.

"Oh! thet's all right, glorious old flower o' ther wilderness," the giant replied. "I've fothed ye an' other dainty morsel fer ye to keep watch over."

"Wagh! I don't want 'nudder," was the decisive answer. "White man got wrong place."

"Oh! go 'long now! Don't ye s'pose this old race-hoss knows his course? Don't ye s'pose I reckonize ther Blue Bell o' ther Crows?"

The face of the squaw suddenly lighted with pleasure at the words.

"Ugh! me Blue Bell," she said, with evident pride.

"Pale-face speak good to Blue Bell. She do what-ebber he want."

"Know'd it," the giant said, leering down into Idyl's face, as he stood her upon her feet, first having cut the bonds which bound her ankles.

"Ye parseeve it's impossible fer ther weaker sex to resist me."

"There is one who very successfully curried you off," Idyl returned, sarcastically. "If he were only here now, I'd not long be a prisoner."

"But he aint hyar, ye see, an' consekently I'm goin' ter leave ye in keer o' the beautiful Blue Bell o' the Crows for a few days. She'll watch ye."

"Ugh! Blue Bell do as pale-face say," the hag replied. "Blue Bell watch young squaw berry much."

Seizing her by the shoulder Gasket pushed the girl-miner into the hut, and then handed the hag a revolver.

"You just keep every galoot away until I come, and ye shell hev gold til ye ar so dazzled thet ye ken't see natrally fer a week. Don't let no one approach ther place ner git sight o' ther gal. D'ye hear?"

"Blue Bell hear berry much. She do as white man say."

At this moment there was a childish scream from the inside, and a grim expression came over the squaw's face.

"What's that?" Cross-eyed Mike grunted, suspiciously. "You've got a boy in thar, Blue Bell; tain't no Injun brat, nuther."

"None of pale-face's business," Blue Bell replied, angrily. "Nudder pale-face leab boy."

"Phew!" and the giant gave vent to a prolonged whistle. "Ten to one it's ther boy Cavendish hes got, w'ich b'longs ter thet Joaquin's wife!"

"Ugh! Cavendish!" Blue Bell assented, with nod.

"He pay Blue Bell heap gold for keepin' pappoose."

"He told you thet, did he?"

"Um!"

"Waal, now, just don't ye suck thet shennanigum fer a cent's worth, old beauty. Old Cavendish hes bin imposin' on yer confederence. He's broke—hain't got the sent o' a copper about his togs—bank's closed ter wait fer resumption, ye see."

"Wagh! mean he got no money?" the squaw demanded, wildly.

"Jest that, peractly. But, don't git on yer ear. I'll pay fer ther brat an' ther gal both, an' ye jest keep all other hoomans away from hyar. Heer's ten gold dollars fer ye. Now, d'ye heer? ef any one comes nosin' around, Cavendish or no Cavendish, you plug it to 'em wi' thet revolver."

"Blue Bell not forgit if pale-face gib her drink whisky," was the cunning reply of the squaw.

Fortunately the giant never traveled without a pocket-flask, and this he now produced, and handed it to the Blue Bell of the Crows.

She tipped it to her thick lips a couple of times, and then handed it back empty.

The giant stared a moment; then, dropping the bottle, vaulted into the saddle, and gathered up the reins to depart.

"See thet ye keep good care o' them!" he said, pointing within the hut, "an' ye shell hev a quart o' thet stuff w'en I come back."

Then, plunging the spurs into his animal's flanks, he dashed away over the back trail toward Cascade gulch, leaving Idyl a prisoner in the power of the old Indian hag.

Now unburdened, the giant made the best of his animal's speed. He was anxious, if possible, to get back into the diggings before the two plotters should start in search of the gold, which was cached somewhere in the mountains.

It was now well on toward morning, and the moon had gone nearly down, which of course increased the

gloom, but the ruffian pushed recklessly on, unmindful of danger.

Horseflesh was of little value in his eyes, compared with gold; and he was resolved to have a share of the old hermit's treasure should it ever be found.

On, on he dashed, leaving the table-lands, and descending into the black depths of the ravine.

Suddenly his horse stumbled clumsily over some object, and went crashing to the ground headforemost, hurling the giant far ahead out of the saddle, where he landed heavily upon the rocks, and lay like one dead.

He was not killed, however, only unconscious. He awoke after awhile, with a gasp of pain, but when he would have arisen to his feet, he made the startling discovery that he was securely bound, hand and foot.

Following this discovery, he crawled into a sitting posture, and gazed around him in bewilderment.

He was lying nearly in the same spot where he had fallen, as he was able to determine, for only a few yards away lay his horse—dead!

Beyond this a little camp-fire had been built, and its blaze lighted up the darkness of the black ravine, and around it a couple of persons were pacing, in conversation the while.

The giant muttered a curse as he recognized them.

One was the Spotter-Sport, Rosebud Rob, while the other was none other than the girl eccentric, Baltimore Bess.

They seemed to have heard the giant's expletive, for they turned toward him, and then approached.

Without first speaking, they seized him, and dragged him forward into the firelight.

Then they let him go, and stood gazing down upon him.

"Well, air ruffian," Sport exclaimed, after a short pause, "what have you got to say of yourself? We are waiting for you to speak, before we conclude the ceremonies of to-night, by hanging you up to dry!"

"Cuss ye!" the giant growled, his bias eyes glittering, wolfishly. "Let me up. Wat d'ye mean?"

"We meant hang a few moments ago. I don't opine we've changed our mind any—eh, Bess?"

"Nary one bit!" the dare-devil assented. "We two fellers hev assembled together in solemn conclave, an' we do sw'ar, an' agree, that a notorious rough by ther appellation uv Cross-Eyed Mike, have got ter go trouting up river Jordan. Them's ther percie constitoshunal plans an' specifications o' this hyar court, you bet yer stogy boots."

"Cuss ye!" the giant breathed, again, vainly endeavoring to burst the thongs that bound him. "I tell ye ter set me at liberty, or some 'un 'll git hurt, now, purty quick. I don't want no more monkey-mockin', nuther."

"Ha! ha! that's the ticket we vote, too!" Rosebud Rob replied. "We want you to dish out your best, in about the twitch of a mule's ear, or up you go to glory!"

"What d'ye want, then?"

"You know that, without asking. We want to know where you took Idyl Abbey, the girl miner!"

"Go find out—I'll not tell ye!" the giant replied, with an evil grin. "She's whar you'd nevyer find her, ef ye war ter s'arch a thousan' years."

Rosebud Rob and Baltimore Bess both seemed to agree that this was merely a parrty, by an exchange of glances.

"You need not try that game," the Sport said. "We ain't dealing in that kind of stock. You've got to either tell us where the girl is, or swing, and that in mighty short order, too, I won't tolerate trifling, in the least."

"Oh! ye won't, won't ye?" the giant sneered, savagely. "Wal, ye ken jest go ahead an' stretch my neck as much as ye please, fer I won't scare inter tellin' wuth a whale."

"Then hang you shall, and we'll find the captive afterward. Bess, gal, fetch the halter."

The girl dare-devil nodded, and advancing into the gloom of the ravine, where their horses were concealed, she procured a long, stout lariat, and returned, singing, as she came, in a rollicking tone, the familiar mountain verse:

"We've noosed a lariat to a limb,
Heigh! hi! ho! heigh! hi! ho
We've coched a Tartar—we'll hang him,
Heigh! hi! ho! in the mornin'."

The giant began to curse and swear in a frightful manner, when he saw the rope, and Rosebud Rob was forced to shove a pistol under his nose, before he would desist.

With a coolness befitting one of twice her years, Baltimore made a noose with one end of the lariat, and slipped it over the giant's head, shirring it snugly about his throat.

"Thar, neow!" she said, with a chuckle. "How's that fit yer notion fer a Piccadilly collar? Fit's yer thrut ruther better then et do yer notion, eh? Wal, ye'll git used ter it after a leetle practice. Nevyer know'd a man yet who didn't like it, after several trials!"

"Bess, you are incorrigible," the Sport said, with a smile.

Then, turning to the giant, he said:

"Come! If you have any desire for further life, tell me where to find the girl, within five minutes, or you die!"

"Will ye set me at liberty, ef I tell ye?" the ruffian demanded.

"Not at present!" the Sport replied. "You cannot catch me with chaff, you'll find. I should require you to accompany me to where you have concealed the girl—ay, perhaps further. Do you know the location of the secret treasure-cache of the old hermit?"

"Nary a know. Wish I did."

"Well, will you tell me, or rather guide me to the place where Idyl is concealed?"

"No. I'll be hanged furst."

"This is final?"

"Reckon et is!" was the grim response.

The giant was evidently determined to die, rather than to yield the secret. He seemed to be prompted, in this, by a desire to thwart the aims of the Sport.

Rosebud Rob saw this, and was at a loss how to act, and so called the girl dare-devil to one side.

"The ruffian is obstinate, even in the face of death," he said, in a low tone, which he intended should not reach the giant. "I am puzzled whether to lynch the devil, or let him go, or take him with us."

"Lynch him!" Bess said, sententiously. "That's ther only physic fer a warmint like him. Just guv him another show, an' ef he don't snatch fer it, quicker'n a b'ard'n grin at a baby, why, simply—lynch him! Let me pull ther rope, ef ye're skittish about it."

"Which I am not," Rob returned. "Perhaps I've participated in as many hanging scrapes as you."

They returned to the ruffian, and, seizing the lariat, dragged him by the neck to a place where a single tree grew in the canyon, shooting out a few naked branches, as if in preparation for just such occasions.

"Your time is up!" the Sport said, glancing at his watch as Bess tossed the end of the lariat over a limb, and then seized it again. "I ask once more, will you tell me where Idyl Abbey is or will you die?"

"Let her slide!" the giant said. "I'll see all the mysteries o' Inferno afore I'll tell—"

Time was not given him for saying more, for Bess gave a "reef" on the lariat, and the combined strength of herself and the Sport was sufficient to draw the giant into mid-air.

The lariat was then fastened, and, hurrying to their horses, the two regulators were soon dashing away.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION—"WHAT SHALL THE HARVEST BE?"

We will now return to the treasure-hunters, whom we left in front of a black entrance which led into the bowels of the mountains.

"This is the place," Joaquin's wife said, peering ahead into the blackness. "In here the old hermit conceals his gold. 'Tis a catacomb of caves, and we must go slow and sure. Each man light his lantern, and prepare to follow me."

The order was at once obeyed.

Lanterns had been brought from the mines; these were now lighted and carried by each of the quartette.

Berenice leading, they entered the grotto.

At first it was low and narrow, but the further they advanced it widened like a funnel, and continued in this manner for several hundred yards.

Then they suddenly found themselves in a mammoth cavern where their lights were useless, for plenty of this commodity streamed down through a large hole in the dome above. This light told them that morning had dawned upon the mountain peaks in the outer world.

The inside of this inter-mountain chamber was a wonder in its natural beauty. It seemed as though the hand of man had been the architect. The floor was nearly as smooth as a pane of glass, and must have embraced several acres, from one side to the other.

Commencing at the right hand, a natural corridor wound up the rugged sides of the cavern, making three tiers of galleries, and reminding the spectator of a Roman amphitheater.

The three treasure-hunters, headed by Joaquin's wife, paused to gaze upon the awe-inspiring scene, before advancing further.

"This is magnificent!" the Englishman muttered, admiringly. "I don't think I ever saw its equal."

"Arrah! w'at a mighty fine place it would be for roller-skatin', indade, ontirely!" assured Mrs. C., enthusiastically in her admiration. "Ivery time ye fell, yez'd crack yer brains out, shure."

"There is no time for talk!" Berenice interposed. "We must search for the treasure, although I fear we are too late!"

"How too late?" Devere demanded, savagely. "Explain yourself."

"Easily done. I fear that the hermit has already secured his treasure, and taken his departure."

"But he did not pass us as we entered?"

"No; if he has escaped at all it is by another way. There is another passage leading out of this chamber, similar to that by which we entered, and he has probably gone that way. We will first search the cache to make sure."

She led the way out into the center of the glassy surface, closely followed by Devere and his lordship and his wife.

Pausing in the center, as nearly as she could guess, she glanced sharply around, and soon knelt beside a crevice in the surface, the shape of a square.

Drawing a knife from beneath the folds of her dress, she set to work, and pried up a block of rock, and hurriedly pushed it aside. Then, by the aid of a strap, she lowered her lantern into a sort of pit below, following it with her piercing gaze.

A cry burst from her lips, and she drew back involuntarily.

"It is gone! The old man has been here!" she said.

A savage curse burst from the lips of Cavendish, and, springing upon the woman, he dragged her back upon the floor, and placing his foot upon her breast drew a revolver.

"The fiends take you!" he hissed, fiercely, and be-

fore either Devere or the Irishwoman could prevent he took deliberate aim and fired, twice in succession.

Poor Berenice gave but a single answering groan; then her spirit fled: she was dead.

"In the name of Heaven, why did you do this?" Devere cried, aghast. "You have not only done murder, but you have forever killed our chances for getting possession of the hermit's gold."

"Bah! 'tis easy to track the ould divil now," cried Mrs. C., excitedly.

"Of course," agreed the Englishman. "I intended to kill the woman all the time in order to retain possession of the boy, which must yet fetch me a handsome sum. Ha! by all the miracles, look there!"

He pointed to one of the upper corridors, where, on looking, all beheld the head and shoulders of Old Elk, the hermit, suddenly draw down out of sight.

The old man was hiding in the corridors from his enemies, and had been making observations of the scene below, when some unlucky chance caused Cavendish to gaze upward in that direction.

"By Heaven! 'tis the hermit," Devere cried, jubilantly. "Hurrah! let's roust him out of that! The golden treasure is now ours."

And yelling like so many savages the two men ran to the foot of the natural ascent, and begun climbing upward into the galleries.

Mrs. C. did not follow them, but turned and retreated into the funnel-entrance.

Eagerly on and upward the two villains clambered, their eagerness encouraging them to extraordinary exertion. Puffing and panting they kept on, until but a few yards intervened between them and the old hermit, who stood in front of a large leather sack which lay upon the floor. The old man stood with one of his stout oaken crutches upraised, evidently determined to fight to the last.

"Surrender!" Cavendish cried, triumphantly, cocking one of his revolvers, while Devere imitated his example. "Surrender! It's no use to resist. We're two to one, and either you give up, or you die!"

"Them's our terms!" Devere put in, with a malicious laugh. "Pony up the wealth in that bag, behind you, or you're a dead man!"

"Keep off, you human fiends—keep off, or I will brain you!" the hermit cried, in hoarse tones. "You shall not have the gold; I will die in defense of it a hundred times, first!"

Alas! it was useless, however, for him to resist. Both men fired at the same time, and with a groan, he fell to the ground, blood spurting from his wounds.

Then the human wolves rushed forward, and while Cavendish seized the bag, Devere grasped the dying hermit by the heels, and both were dragged down upon the floor of the cavern from the galleries above.

Here they paused a moment, to gain breath, before examining the treasure, which was heavy enough for several fortunes.

"Where's the Irishwoman?" Devere demanded, suddenly noting her disappearance. "She must die next, and then our trail is clear. Rosebud Rob dead; Joaquin's wife dead; the hermit and the Irish ditto, and we have triumphed!"

"Curse the woman! Let's first look in the bag!" Cavendish growled.

And with eager hands he cut the tie-string, and pulled the mouth of the bag open!

Then, through the cavern sprang a terrible howl of disappointment, coming simultaneously from both men.

The bag was filled merely with fine gravel, which would not have assayed an ounce of gold!

"We have been duped—cheated!" Byron Cavendish breathed, with a curse. "The old hermit has secreted his gold, and filled this bag, to baffle us. Quick! before it is too late, we will have the secret from him, if we have to tear out his heart."

"Too late, there, even!" Devere replied, hoarsely, as he arose from the hermit's side. "The old man is dead!"

The baronet seemed transformed into a living fury, so frightful were his rage and disappointment.

"We are fooled all around, and the gold is lost!" Devere said. "We have no choice but—"

"To submit to arrest!" cried a cool, triumphant voice.

"In the name of the law, we arrest you both for the murder of Old Elk, the hermit, and numerous other citizens!"

And scarcely before the two villains were aware of it, they were securely handcuffed, and confronted by Rosebud Rob, Baltimore Bess, and the lord's wife, who proceeded at once to doff her disguise, and there stood before them in person, Mr. George Pearsons, a noted Eastern detective, who, in conjunction with Rosebud Rob, had been waiting for this very hour to arrive, when he could effect their arrest. Pearsons, also, had shadowed the young baronet westward from New York, under the impression that he was an escaped criminal from Sing Sing; but he had been convinced of his mistake.

The hermit and Berenice Muriete were buried in the cavern; then, with the two prisoners, the trio of detectives set out on their return to Cascade City.

On their way they came unexpectedly upon Sir Tom Somers, leading his horse along through the mountains, and in the saddle was seated Idyl, whom the plucky Britisher had found and rescued, as well as Little Pet, Joaquin's child.

Idyl was not told of her father's death until she arrived in Cascade City, and it was lucky, for the shock and what she had endured, totally unnerved her, and she lay for weeks upon a sick-bed. Sir Tom was head nurse, however, and much was owing to him that she ever recovered.

In the meantime, the two criminals received a

miner's trial, and upon being proven guilty, were lynched without delay.

Idyl finally recovered, and one day asked for Rosebud Rob. Upon his appearance before her, she said:

"Mr. Mapleton, I have had a strange dream concerning my poor father's buried treasure; that you know where it was concealed. Is this so?"

"Ay! even so, Miss Abbey. I and Pearsons found out where the gold was by trailing your father by stealth to the spot, and when he had gone, we entered the cavern, found the gold, and reburied it in another place for safety, substituting a bag of gravel in place of it. It will give us great pleasure now, to place in your hands a fortune. I will go for it to-day."

He kept his word, and set out for the cavern at once. Upon arriving there, another surprise greeted him.

Upon the grave of Berenice Muriete a form was lying, cold and silent.

It was Joaquin, Jr.

"Poor fellow!" the Sport muttered. "He has not long outlived his wife, whom I believe he loved sincerely. I will leave him as he has lain himself. The boy still lives, and I hold the map to the secret mine, which, I take it, is beneath the falls. Heigh ho! I wonder what shall the harvest be?"

Securing the treasure he returned to Cascade City, and delivered it to Idyl.

Enough wealth was there to keep the girl-miner weighing for a week; and, it is said, she and Sir Tom (for they are soon to be married) will be independently rich. Little Pet is to live with them.

The Spotter-Sport is still in Cascade City, as is Baltimore Bess. Pearsons has come East.

Of the Sport and Dare-devil Bess, we do not mean to lose sight.

THE END.

Rosebud Rob, Novel, No. 3 Soon to Follow.

ANOTHER BIG GUN.

Photograph Phil, THE BOY SLEUTH; OR, Rosebud Rob's Reward.

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